# REGINALD.

A ROMANCE.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

# REGINALD,

OR THE

# *HOUSE OF MIRANDOLA.*

A Romance.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

BY

THE AUTHOR OF MELBOURNE, &c.

> " All ſolemn things
> " Should anſwer ſolemn accidents!—The matter?
> " Triumphs for nothing, and laments for toys,
> " Is jollity for apes, and grief for boys."
>
> CYMBELINE.

VOL. II.

*LONDON:*
PRINTED AT THE
Minerva-Preſs,
FOR WILLIAM LANE, LEADENHALL-STREET.
1799.

# REGINALD.

## CHAP. I.

"Peace, ſtorms of night! ye roaring whirlwinds, peace!
"Soft glide, ye torrents, from the echoing hills!
"Riſe from the murky vale, ye blood-red fires,
"And dimly ſhoot your beams! Ye famiſh'd wolves,
"Ceaſe your wild howl! Let all be ſilent—dark!
"Ghoſts of my fathers, bend your ſhadowy forms
"To hear the tale!"

SAYER.

SIGISMOND awoke with the earlieſt beams of the ſun, which ſtreamed through his broken caſements. His ſlumbers, though not long, had been the refreſhing offspring of youth, health, and innocence, and he aroſe invigorated and enlivened. The firſt idea

idea that recurred to him in the morning, was the picture of the Marquis Mirandola, which he determined to reſtore to the place it had once poſſeſſed; and uncloſing the door that led into the dark apartment, he brought it from its gloomy receſs, to be once more illumined by the light of the ſun; with ſome trouble he replaced it on the hook it had formerly occupied, and he ſtood gazing earneſtly at it for ſome minutes. The light was favourable, and the painting ſeemed ready to ſtart from the canvas. Sigiſmond gazed till he almoſt imagined its eye-balls followed his, and that the ſerious, though benevolent ſmile of the mouth ſoftened into a fond expreſſion of pleaſure.

"And wert thou," ſaid he, addreſſing the inanimate figure, "wert thou the father of my Agnes? And doſt thou ſmile on my affection for her? Oh injured Agnes! if, indeed, thou art the daughter of Mirandola, all this domain ſhould be thine; and Rezzonico is the moſt unjuſt, as well as the moſt arbitrary of mortals."

He

He resolved to investigate this circumstance, of which he felt internally convinced, as far as he possibly could; and if he discovered that Agnes was really the heiress of the Marquis, he determined to reinstate her in her rights, though at the hazard of losing her.

Again he explored the dark room, and brought from thence several pieces of the old armour, which having, as well as he could, cleaned from the rust and dirt that encrusted them, he disposed in a sort of trophy beneath the picture; and while the expressive device, and its appropriate motto, shone clear and unobscured, he vowed fervently to be ever faithful and firm in the cause of innocence and justice.

While this self-erected Knight was thus employed, Ghiberti again approached his room, and requested admission. He came to enquire how the youth had rested; but when he remarked the picture, he became pale, and almost unable to support himself.

"Who brought it there?" ſaid Ghiberti, in a hurried voice.

"I did," replied Sigiſmond; "do you not recollect it was not there laſt night?"

"And how came you, Signor, to know where to find it again?" enquired Ghiberti.

"You yourſelf," anſwered the youth, "were my informer."

"When, Signor, did I ever ſpeak to you of ſuch a picture?" ſaid the old man, gazing earneſtly firſt at Sigiſmond, and then at the portrait.

"Not, indeed, to me," replied Sigiſmond, "but on our journey you were converſing with Franciſco about it.

"True, Signor; and I ſaid, I remember, that it was in the dark apartment beyond the vaulted room at the end of the eaſt gallery; and, by St. Paul, Franciſco was right!"

"Right! in what?" enquired Sigiſmond.

"In the reſemblance he diſcovered," ſaid Ghiberti; "but, Signor, you muſt have

have been very bold, very courageous in-deed, to venture into that room by your-ſelf.—Oh, if you knew all that is ſaid!"

"I was not then," ſaid the youth, "ſo courageous as ignorant; and now do, good Ghiberti, relate to me the hiſtories with which you ſeem ſo well acquainted."

"Ah, Signor!" ſaid Ghiberti, "I have not now time, for the Prince ſent me to let you know that all the cavaliers are aſſem-bled, and propoſe following the chaſe to-day; that they will return before night-fall, and till then he wiſhes you to remain in your apartment. I will take care that you ſhall have refreſhment, Signor."

"I thank you, Ghiberti," replied Sigiſ-mond; "but there is nothing I ſo much wiſh for as a conference with the Prince.—Will you be the bearer of my requeſt to him?"

"I will," ſaid the old man, "and im-mediately, for he charged me to return.—You ſhall ſoon know the reſult, Signor." And with theſe words Ghiberti departed.

Sigiſmond had reſolved, in the requeſted conference, to demand of the Prince a full explanation of the myſtery of his birth, and the nature of the right by which he detained him at Voltorno. He determined to aſſert his own freedom, and at the ſame time not to loſe ſight of the grand ſecret he had diſcovered; but while he ſought to learn who he himſelf really was, to ſtrive to find out alſo whether Agnes was not the heireſs of Mirandola. To theſe two points, therefore, he collected all his thoughts, and ſummoned all his fortitude to ſupport him during the interview; but time wore away, and Ghiberti returned not. He opened the door into the eaſt gallery, and walking up to the further end of it, reſolved to eſſay to find the room where he had paſſed the evening with the Signors; but he felt a mingled tumult of diſappointment and indignation on diſcovering that the door was locked. Shocked to find himſelf a priſoner, every horrible idea ruſhed upon his mind.

The ſituation that was choſen for him, the

the deſerted and ruinous ſtate of this part of the caſtle, its diſtance from the inhabited part, and the impoſſibility of gaining any information from its broken windows, which were placed ſo high as to be wholly out of reach, were circumſtances that altogether contributed to deprive him of compoſure. He walked with a hurried ſtep up and down the long gallery, from which at length he perceived the ſun was rapidly retiring; and determining to gaze once more at the portrait of his Agnes's father, before he loſt the advantage of the illumination ſo peculiarly favourable to it, he returned to his own miſerable room, and again fixed his eyes on that benevolent and placid countenance, whoſe ſmile recalled him to peace and compoſure, and the motto, by the peculiar effects of the ſun-beams, which ſhone in a ſlant ray upon the letters, looked uncommonly brilliant, and "Faithful and Firm," blazed upon him with reproachful luſtre. Recovering the natural equanimity of his mind, Sigiſmond determined no more to loſe it; and

having again vowed to protect the orphan daughter of the Marquis, whom Zadeſki had mentioned, and whom he himſelf felt convinced was Agnes, he returned to pace up and down the gallery, in expectation of Ghiberti.

As he watched, however, for the approach of a footſtep, he heard the diſtant ſound of horſes' feet, and as they ſeemed going from the caſtle, he doubted not but that it was the Prince and his party, gone on their purpoſed expedition; and ſoon after he diſtinguiſhed footſteps on the ſtairs that led to the gallery. He heard the key cautiouſly applied to the lock, and gradually turned, as if to prevent the noiſe it made from being heard ſo far as his room; at length the door uncloſed, and Benedetto entered. He brought with him refreſhments, and was followed by a lad with mattreſſes and better bedding. The lad went into the chamber to depoſit his load, and Sigiſmond detained Benedetto in the gallery, leſt he ſhould diſcover his new-found treaſure. He placed

the provifion on an old oaken table that ftood in the gallery, faying, he fhould remain there for the advantage of air, as it was lefs clofe than his own room.

The man then told him that the Prince and his party were gone, and would not return till evening; and Sigifmond carelefsly enquiring if they took a large train of attendants, learned that Ghiberti, and two more only, had accompanied him.

The lad having difpofed of the luggage he brought in the beft manner he could, Benedetto propofed to depart, apologizing to Sigifmond for locking the door, faying, it was the exprefs order of the Prince that he fhould be detained there until his return.

Sigifmond, without any refentment, bade the man obey his orders; and as he dared not truft Benedetto, was not forry to fee him depart, and to find himfelf once more alone.

As he now feemed fure of being unmolefted the whole day, he determined to explore the reft of the deferted chambers along

the gallery, and as soon as he thought Benedetto was out of hearing, he went into his own room for the lamp, which he imagined he might want, and having lit it by the fire which the lad had rekindled, he prepared to begin his search; but the keys were out of the doors, and there appeared no means by which he could obtain entrance into rooms that so much excited his curiosity. Fearing lest he must abandon a search from which he expected he knew not what of information and amusement, he set down his lamp on the oaken table, and walked up and down the gallery, looking reluctantly forward through the long interval he had to pass alone, and without employment, and not with much pleasure to the return of Rezzonico and his companions. He feared every thing from the malevolence of the Prince, and imagined that Ghiberti had betrayed to his master something at least of the interest and affection he expressed towards himself, and was therefore purposely kept out of his way; though

though ſometimes he felt inclined to doubt whether Ghiberti were really as much attached to him as he appeared to be, or whether it was not a maſk aſſumed for the purpoſe of betraying him more completely into the power of the Prince. Yet, how could he be more completely in his power? A priſoner unarmed, uninformed of the ſituation of the Caſtle, and the relative poſition of his apartment, he could neither eſcape nor reſiſt.

"Yet," thought he, "the care that is taken to guard me, proves that at leaſt ſome apprehenſions are entertained of me; and the obſcure, the unknown Sigiſmond is formidable to the mighty Prince Rezzonico! Who then am I? and what advantages, what ſecurity is the Prince to obtain by my death? or by my perpetual detention here, worſe to me than even death? Here, ſecluded from the very few human beings that have ever cared about me, I may periſh, unnoticed and unknown! If I have a name, it will ſink with me into

eternal oblivion! If I have rights, who ſhall defend them, or their unſuſpected poſſeſſor? If I am, as Rezzonico himſelf told me, the ſon of a noble and illuſtrious father, who ſhall aſſiſt me to claim my inheritance? Yet who is this parent—or rather who was he?—He periſhed while I was yet at a diſtance! He died, and has left me in the power of the Prince whom I diſtruſt, and (as far as I can fear any human being) whom I fear, but in whom my father placed unlimitted confidence!—Oh my father! that I had but arrived in time to receive your lateſt ſigh!—Yet, how ſtrange is the conduct of Rezzonico! Since the moment that he announced to me the death of this unknown parent, he has never once mentioned him, nor allowed me a ſingle opportunity of enquiring after him!—Benedetto I cannot truſt at all! and even on Ghiberti I tremble to rely!—Yet why ſhould I fear—I who have injured no one—to whom theſe ſuppoſed intereſts, which ſeem to threaten my deſtruction, are utterly indifferent?"

Loſt

Loſt in a labyrinth of conjectures, he continued to pace up and down the corridor with unequal ſteps, ſometimes gazing on the inacceſſible windows, and ſometimes eagerly examining the doors of the numerous apartments that fronted them, till at length it ſuddenly ſtruck him that his chamber, and the dark cell beyond it, were evidently the laſt chambers in the gallery; and that the uſual mode of building at the period when this caſtle was erected, was with a communication from one room to another, all along each ſide of the quadrangle. He had already diſcovered the door between his bed-room and the dark cell beyond it; and it occurred to him that he might poſſibly find an entrance on the oppoſite ſide of his room that would lead to the apartments down the corridor.

Impreſſed with this idea, he took up his lamp, which he would certainly want in the deſerted apartments he was going to explore, and at length perceived a door, concealed by the tattered hangings of the bed.

The

The bolts were rusted so firmly, that he could not undraw them; but the wood-work was so rotten that he separated it with perfect ease, and found himself in an apartment whose height and size were magnificent. The windows, which were within reach, looked into an inner court of the castle, now overgrown with weeds, and over some low buildings across a beautiful and extensive country. A magnificent crimson and gold state bed pointed out this as the bed-chamber of the late unfortunate Marquis; and the room, now occupied by Sigismond, had probably been appropriated to his servant. A book of religious exercises lay open on the table, and a fowling-piece was standing in one corner, covered with rust. Sigismond gazed around this room with strong feelings of interest and melancholy; the figure of Mirandola, so familiar to his ideas from the sculptured effigies and the picture, seemed yet to live in his imagination in these apartments, probably destined to his particular use. Through this room he passed

into

into another of equal ſpace, and ſuperior magnificence. Here a few ſhelves, on which books were yet ſtanding, caught the eye of Sigiſmond, and he determined to appropriate thoſe treaſures to his own immediate uſe; from this room two doors led into other ſuites of rooms, one of which had evidently belonged to the Marchioneſs. Many little trifles, in daily uſe with women, yet lay ſcattered on the table, and he found in a half-open drawer ſome torn papers, on which he gazed with eagerneſs, in the idea that they were the writing of that unfortunate woman, whoſe fate ſeemed to have been ſo myſterious. At the end of theſe apartments were paſſages which led to ſtairs, of which ſome aſcended, and others led probably to a ſimilar ſuite of apartments below.

He had now paſſed ſo much time in examining thoſe he had already ſeen, that he feared his lamp would not laſt while he examined thoſe that remained;—returning, therefore, to his own wretched room, he took as he paſſed, ſome of the books yet

left

left of the Marquis's library, and determined to go over the other chambers the following day.

The hope of finding ſome means of eſcaping from the caſtle, prompted the ſearch he reſolved to make; though when he recollected the depth and breadth of the foſſe that ſurrounded it, he began almoſt to fear that to eſcape was impoſſible. He now ſeated himſelf in the moſt cheerful part of the corridor, meaning to beguile the hours until the Prince's return with a book, and then to demand the conference, which he determined ſhould be deciſive. The diſcovery of the communication with the other apartments, he reſolved to conceal even from Ghiberti, whom he was not inclined to rely on wholly; and felt that while he depended on himſelf alone, he was at leaſt ſure of not being betrayed, but that if he ſuffered from his indiſcretion, he ſhould feel a great deal more from his lengthened confinement. He opened the book, and on the firſt leaf was written—“ Henry Sebaſtian,

Sebaſtian, Marquis de Mirandola," and at the bottom, were the well-known words, "Faithful and Firm."

The ſtrange coincidence of the Marquis's motto with Father Buonafede's advice to himſelf, now ſtruck him as a wonderful ſingularity. The extreme anger too, that Rezzonico had betrayed whenever the words were repeated, ſeemed no leſs ſurpriſing, until he recollected that theſe words were now alſo the motto of the Prince, who inherited the poſſeſſions and arms of Mirandola. Strange ideas now floated in his brain, which he could not attend to his book ſufficiently to diſſipate; nor was he ſorry when a footſtep, near the end of the gallery, induced him to conceal his book, and helped to break the thread of his ideas. Almoſt immediately the keys turned in the locks, the bolts were withdrawn, and Benedetto appeared; he brought with him proviſions, and having placed them on the oaken table, he began trimming the lamp, telling Sigiſmond that a meſſenger was arrived from my

Lord

Lord the Prince, stating that the chace had carried them to such a distance in the forest, that they determined to pass the night at a hunting seat of the Count Ubaldo's, and would not return until late in the following day.

"His Highness," continued Benedetto, "has renewed his orders about your close confinement here till his return; so I have immediately brought you provisions and light, and the lad is coming to replenish your fire, that you may not want any thing before morning, as it will not be in my power to visit you again till then. I suppose, Signor," added Benedetto, "you like a fire—it is cheerful in these old rooms."

Sigismond, seeing Benedetto inclined to talk while he waited for the lad, thought that, perhaps, he might obtain a little information from him, and asked him what those rooms were whose doors were unopened.

"Oh!" said Benedetto, "I know nothing about them; they have never been opened

opened ſince I lived at the caſtle; nor ſhould I ever have come near them, if it had not been my Lord the Prince's particular orders that the vaulted room, at the end of the eaſt gallery, ſhould be got ready for you. I muſt ſay I thought it odd of my Lord the Prince to fix upon that room for you; for, thinks I, there muſt have been ſome reaſon or other for its being ſhut up, and out of uſe ſo many years; and, indeed, I know a fooliſh fellow that is gone away from hence, one Pietro, uſed to ſay there was reaſon enough and enough for its being left to itſelf, as well as all the chambers the gallery door ſhuts in; for he ſays as how they were all the particular apartments of my Lord the Marquis of Mirandola, and he not coming fairly by his end, and never having been buried, walks in ſome or other of theſe rooms every night; and, indeed, they did ſay, both Pietro and ſome others that were in the family when I firſt came here, that my Lord the Prince did at firſt attempt to uſe theſe rooms himſelf, for when

he

he firſt came here, they were in very good repair, and very magnificently furniſhed; but he never lay but two nights in them, and then pretending that the weſt ſide of the caſtle looked over the pleaſanteſt country, he ſhut up all theſe rooms, and removed over to the other ſide, which he ſoon made habitable; but though he never would own that he was frighted away by the ghoſt of the Marquis, we all ſuſpected as much."

Sigiſmond, willing to gain all the information he could from his talkative companion, ſaid—"I underſtand the Marchioneſs Mirandola ſurvived her huſband, with her young daughter; pray do you know any thing of her?"

"No, Signor, not I; all that I know is only from report, for I was not in the family at that time; but I know ſome ſaid the Marchioneſs and her child, (a daughter, you ſay, Signor), did live, and ſome ſay they both died for grief; however, ſhe was here at the time, and ſhe went to another caſtle

castle of the Marquis's, near which he was beset by the robbers, and murdered; and though she tried to find the body, she never could;—so she had a tomb raised to him, in the chapel belonging to that other castle, but she could not put the body in it, because she could not find it; and the Prince my master was heir to that castle also, and he went to live there; but he did not like it, and it wanted a deal of repairs, so he pulled it down, and built a small house some way off, but he never went to live there at all."

Sigismond, who well knew that Benedetto was speaking of Pontalti, asked if the Prince was supposed to have any particular reason for pulling down that other castle?

"No, Signor," replied Benedetto, "no reason at all; except, as I told you, that he did not like it, and it wanted a deal of repairs; and what, you know, Signor, could any man want with two such castles? for I am told that other was as big as this, and my Lord has got a fine house in Naples besides;

befides; but that's fo far off, or for one reafon or other, he don't go there often. He goes with my Lord the Count Ubaldo to Venice very often;—but it's getting very dufky, Signor, I muft go and fee after this boy, to come and do up the fire; I cannot ftand talking here."

The loquacious Benedetto here departed, and foon after returned with the poor lad, who acknowledged that he had not been able to gain courage to come to the gallery alone; and though, while they both remained with him, Sigifmond affected to make light of their fears, yet, when the laft found of their departing footfteps ceafed to be heard, and he reflected that he was alone in a part of the caftle ftigmatized by fo many tales, and the object of fear to all the domeftics,—that this wing was very remote from the other parts of the edifice, and that he had reafon to believe he had been decoyed there for no very juft or honourable purpofe, he felt his heart affailed by fears of either living or ghoftly agents, and it was fome time ere he

could

could ſufficiently compoſe his ſpirits to attend to his books. He opened ſeveral, none ſeemed to intereſt him, till at length he fixed on one which appeared to contain the annals of the family of Mirandola. He determined that this ſhould furniſh him with entertainment for the evening; and, drawing his chair near the fire, he took ſome of the refreſhments with which Benedetto had provided him, and felt himſelf, after a glaſs or two of Florence wine, more in ſpirits to oppoſe whatever might chance to attack him. He took a few turns along the gallery, entered the dark cell from whence he had drawn the picture, examined it, leſt it ſhould conceal any hidden entrance, or unſeen trap-door, but found nothing to alarm his fears, or excite the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion; and then, as well as he could, faſtening the door which led from behind his bed into the deſerted apartments, he reſolved to give alarm to the winds, and amuſe himſelf with the book.

It appeared to have been written by many

ſucceſſive inheritors of the honours of Mirandola, and ſhewed that the family had its beginning in the remoteſt antiquity. Of the early records he could make out very little; the ſtyle was obſolete, and the characters ſtill more difficult to decipher. As he advanced, however, the manuſcript became more legible, and in ſome parts was written with a ſtudious attention to ſtyle, which marked the general advancement of literature. He was amuſed in tracing the different characters of the Chiefs of Mirandola, as drawn by their own pens; in finding one to be a courtier, by the finiſhed turn of his phraſes; another to have been a fop, by the ſtudied flouriſhes of the handwriting; he diſcovered the warrior by the blunt elevation of the ſentiments; and the pedant by the far-fetched ornaments of the language; but the moſt generally accompliſhed and engaging character among the earlier predeceſſors of the houſe of Mirandola, was Lorenzo, the ſecond Marquis, who appeared to have united in himſelf the varied qualifications

qualifications that ennoble the gentleman, the ſcholar, and the ſoldier.

Lorenzo had gone early to war, and had reaped ſome laurels in the field—laurels which, to uſe his own words, "I may at this diſtance of time acknowledge, without being ſuſpected of vain glory, did not loſe their freſhneſs by being compared with thoſe of the moſt illuſtrious warriors.

"But I was not animated alone," continued he, "by the deſire of glory; the paſſion of love impelled me to perform actions that ſhould render me worthy of the lovely and noble Leonora! Leonora, long cruel and indifferent to me, had no ſooner begun to be ſoftened in my favour by the campaigns I had made, and the dangers I had incurred, than ſhe was promiſed by her father to Hypolito, Count of Urbino, long my bittereſt enemy. If I lamented this determination, I had alſo the ſatisfaction of knowing that the bright eyes of my fair miſtreſs wept it alſo. I received from her confidante, who was in my intereſt, proofs of

her ardent and unalterable passion, and I sent her, by the same trusty friend, an agate, on which was wrought the device I from that time bore on my shield, a dog reposing at the foot of a rock, with the motto, "Faithful and Firm."—The beauteous Leonora condescended to accept my emblem, and to testify her approbation of it, by sending me a lock of her matchless tresses, the bright gold of which most aptly signified the pure and incorruptible nature of her attachment, and the soft ringlets in which it wound round my finger, fully expressed the gentle bondage in which her unparalleled charms held my heart. Hypolito, too well informed of our mutual attachment, formed the ungenerous project of seizing and confining me until his marriage with Leonora should have removed her for ever from my reach; and one night, as I was returning from a meeting with our faithful confidante, I was suddenly, amidst the darkness of the night, seized by three ruffians, bound, gagged, and carried away,

I knew

I knew not whither, nor for what reaſon. The obſcurity of the night can alone account for the unpardonable negligence of my ſervants, who, being at ſome diſtance from me, were not aware of my capture until reſiſtance or purſuit were equally vain. I was then forcibly borne away, in ſpite of all my remonſtrances, and my guides continued inexorably deaf to all my enquiries about the author of this infamous project. I could not, however, doubt to whom I owed my captivity, which I ſupported with extreme impatience, and from which I was at length releaſed by the aſſiſtance of one who remembered with gratitude ſome ſervices I had formerly done him. Again at liberty, I called Hypolito to the field; and having the good fortune to diſarm him, I made him ſwear upon his ſword to reſign all pretenſions to Leonora, whom, after a period of ſome time, I eſpouſed with her father's conſent."

This narrative, told at much greater length in the manuſcript, had intereſted and

 delighted

delighted Sigiſmond. He figured to himſelf Lorenzo as reſembling the late Marquis, noble in form, manly in feature, engaging in countenance; and imagined Leonora with all the ſoft, bewitching graces of his own Agnes.

Deſirous of finding other anecdotes equally intereſting, Sigiſmond purſued the hiſtory, from which many leaves were in parts torn away; and after a lapſe which he could in no wiſe explain, he ſuddenly came upon the following fragment, which appeared to be in the hand-writing of ſome of the latter ages, as, indeed, a prefatory paragraph explained it to be, having been tranſcribed into more modern language for the ſingularity of the anecdote it contained.

---

"The tournament had continued thus for three days, when on the morning of the fourth, which was deſtined to be the laſt, a new Knight, in plain black armour, entered the liſts, and by his herald proclaimed

defiance

defiance to all who had been victors the preceding days. This daring challenge irritated those Knights whose prowess had been proved in the foregone feats, and some of them hesitated whether to accept a challenge from an utter stranger;—however, the heralds reminded the Knight of the Eagle that he was known only by his device, any more than the newly arrived combatant. The Knight of the Eagle, roused by this remark, accepted the defiance of the black Knight, and the usual ceremonies being performed, in the same style as on the foregoing days, the two Knights entered the lists opposite to each other. The spare figure of the stranger contrasted most admirably with the gigantic stature and sinewy limbs of the Knight of the Eagle; who, elated with his foregone success, could not help uttering some mirthful sarcasms on the singularly thin make and slender form of his opponent; but the black Knight, in a voice that commanded respect, said—' Signor, we come here to try our courage and our

ſkill, not to comment on each other's figure!—Herald, ſound the charge!'—The herald inſtantly obeyed, and the two Knights ruſhed againſt each other with wonderful impetuoſity;—but not long did the conteſt laſt; the Knight of the Eagle was ſoon unhorſed, and obliged to acknowledge the ſuperior addreſs and proweſs of his adverſary.

" Reluctant and aſhamed, the Knight of the Eagle retired from the liſts; for it was a rule inſiſted on by the ſtranger, that whomſoever he vanquiſhed, ſhould ſeek no further trial. The Knight of the Silver Lion, Ugo, Count of Narni, ſhared the ſame fate as the Knight of the Eagle; as did in a very ſhort time Gonzaga, Marquis de Cortona, whoſe device was a lion; and the young and gallant Antonio, Baron di Camboni, who was diſtinguiſhed by a golden ſtar.

" Theſe repeated victories left the Knight of the Black Armour maſter of the field; no other candidates would oppoſe him; and the

the Lady Erminia hung a wreath of laurel on his sable helmet, and threw a chain of gold around his neck; but even when he bent before the fair Erminia, he would not be prevailed on to take off his helmet, nor even to lower his visor, though his manners were peculiarly marked by courtesy and urbanity. Great was the curiosity excited by this unknown Knight; every one was eager to learn who it was that had carried away the palm from all the foregoing victors, each of them from amongst the noblest houses of Italy. The Knight of the Eagle had already been surmised to be the Marquis di San Severo, whose valour and dexterity were universally acknowledged, and whose figure corresponded with the bulky and nervous frame of the Knight, who had been chief conqueror until the arrival of the stranger. But no one could recollect any Nobleman whose form was so lank and bony as that of the black Knight; a person so remarkable every body thought they must instantly recognize, but no one throughout

the numerous aſſemblage of perſons whom the tournament had collected together, could form the moſt diſtant idea who it was.

"The feaſt was now prepared, and the moſt diſtinguiſhed gueſts were invited to ſhare it. The fair Erminia advanced with me to preſs the victorious ſtranger to join the ſocial train; but he was already gone, though no one could tell by what means he had departed. The heralds and attendants who kept the liſts, declared that he had not gone forth by either of the outlets, yet among the remaining crowd he certainly was no longer; for his remarkably tall figure could not be overlooked, and the towering black plume on his black helmet, had rendered him ſtill more eaſily diſtinguiſhable: it was ſingular too, that nobody had remarked the exact moment of his departure, and I remained overwhelmed with regret that a Knight, ſo ſuperior in all feats of arms, ſhould have gone without ſharing in my hoſpitality. I cauſed proclamation to be

be made by the heralds, that the Knight in black armour was requeſted to repair to the Caſtle Voltorno, in order to partake of the feaſt: but no Black Knight could be heard of, and we ſeated ourſelves at table, much diſmayed by the ſingular evaſion of our gallant gueſt.

" While we were yet in the midſt of our gaiety, however, the Knight in black armour ſtood beſide me. Surpriſed at ſeeing him, I entreated him to accept of a ſeat, which was inſtantly brought; and I found, from the whiſpers of the attendants, that no one had ſeen him enter. I beſought him to accept of ſome refreſhment, but he put by all I offered him with a motion of his hand, ſtill caſed in armour. Himſelf and the Knight of the Eagle were now the only gueſts who perſiſted in wearing their armour; and for the Knight of the Eagle, if he were, as was univerſally believed, the Marquis di San Severo, it was not difficult to account for his continuing to keep it on, ſince he was known to be at variance with

Ugo, Count of Narni, the Knight of the Silver Lion, and had they been publicly known to each other, it would have disturbed the harmony of the table; but I now earnestly besought my valiant guest in black armour to take the refreshment of the bath, and uncase those limbs which might well be tired with such exertion. But he courteously refused my offer, though without speaking; nor were we any of us permitted to hear the sound of that voice which had so suddenly and so awfully checked the merriment of the Marquis di San Severo. I felt impressed with I know not what kind of solemn awe as I considered my new guest; his actions were grave, and unlike those of others; his step, when he walked, seemed to carry him forward without exertion; his demeanor was majestic and dignified, and impressed the notion of great superiority. The gaiety of the feast was repressed by his presence; though I could not help rejoicing to see him, as I feared otherwise I should

ſhould have paſſed, in his opinion, for an inhoſpitable Knight.

"At length the gueſts ſeemed ſatisfied with feaſting, and roſe from the table to go to their ſeparate apartments. The caſtle was already ſo full, that no chamber remained unappropriated but the vaulted room beyond my own; this I conſidered as not ſufficiently magnificent for my gueſt, and determined to relinquiſh mine to him, and occupy that myſelf. Attendants were waiting to uncaſe and bathe his tired limbs, and I myſelf accompanied him to the door of his intended chamber. When we arrived at the door, he courteouſly waved his hand to me to enter, and I obeyed; and by another motion of his hand expreſſed a wiſh that the attendants ſhould be diſmiſſed. I knew not how either to refuſe or to comply; the courteſy of his manners, the knightly proweſs of his arms, and the inborn courage of my own heart, forbade me to fear being left alone with a ſingle warrior, even ſhould he prove to be an enemy; while, again, the

ſingular diſappearance and re-appearance of the Knight, his extraordinary carriage, his unbroken ſilence, and the ſolemn hour of the night, impreſſed me with a ſenſation ſomething like awe. The unknown warrior perceived my heſitation, and drawing his ſword from its ſcabbard, he took it by the point, and preſented it to me. This I could by no means permit; and returning his weapon to my generous gueſt, I deſired the attendants to leave the room, but to return when I ſhould ſummon them to aſſiſt the Knight.

"We were now alone; ſtill the Knight preſerved his unbroken ſilence, and glided backwards and forwards up and down the room with a ſort of indeſcribable movement. I felt the ſenſation of awe increaſing almoſt to horror; and this was not leſſened on obſerving the lights in the apartment, added to the blaze of a large and cheerful fire, ſcarcely illuminate it beyond the light of a ſingle taper. This extraordinary obſcurity, the gigantic, though ſpare figure

figure of the Black Knight gliding about in it, and his myſterious ſilence, appalled my ſoul; my knees ſmote each other, a dewy clamminefs involved my limbs, and I was on the point of recalling the attendants, when ſuddenly the lights and the fire wholly expired, and we remained in utter darkneſs. A hollow and ſolemn voice, which I knew for the ſame that had repreſſed the pleaſantry of San Severo, uttered in a deep and awful tone—' Mirandola, I ſee thee not for the laſt time!'

" I believe at theſe ſtrange words my ſenſes deſerted me; for the next circumſtance I remember, is being ſupported by my attendants, with all the lights rekindled, and the fire burning brightly. I enquired of thoſe who ſurrounded me, what had occurred, and they could only tell me that they were recalled by the uſual ſignal, and that they found me alone, extended ſenſeleſs on the floor; nor had any one of them witneſſed the departure of the Black Knight. I detained with me Fernando, a ſervant who had ever been particularly attached to me,

and

and befought him to tell me all that had happened; for I felt perfuaded that fome ferious mifchief had befallen, and when I was convinced, by the proteftations of the poor youth, that I was informed of the whole truth, I immediately concluded that fome future evil threatened my houfe, and difmiffed Fernando, defiring he would fend to me Father Marco, who, however, could but ill fucceed in his endeavours to quiet my uneafinefs. Time did more for me, and time at length had nearly effaced the remembrance of this adventure; when one evening, returning home after a long chace, I found myfelf upon a wide heath, at a diftance from all my attendants; the moon fhone very brightly, and I difcerned in the diftance the hill on which my caftle ftood. As I was gazing, with a view to difcover the turrets of Voltorno, I perceived a figure on horfeback croffing the heath towards me; and as the perfon approached, the idea of the Knight of the Black Armour occurred to me; his figure, his air were the fame,

and

and the chilly damps that overſpread my whole frame, convinced me it was my myſterious viſiter. His former aſſurance, that he did not ſee me for the laſt time, now ſounded again in my ears; and while I combated my fears, a ſudden darkneſs ſhrouded the moon and ſtars, though, on caſting my eyes upwards, I ſtill beheld their orbs unobſcured by clouds. I was now convinced that I was not miſtaken, and was ſoon joined by my unwelcome gueſt. He preſerved the ſame awful ſilence as he rode by my ſide, and I was too much oppreſſed by ſomething very nearly approaching to fear, to utter a ſyllable;—he rode with me to the caſtle gates, which to my great ſurpriſe we found open; and diſmounting, we led our horſes acroſs the great court, till a ſervant appeared to take them from us. The Knight, accoutred ſtill in his ſable armour, ſeemed inſtantly recognized by my attendants; he accompanied me to my chamber, where, in the ſame appalling ſilence, he walked to and fro with that ſingular though majeſtic air.

At

At length, unable longer to endure the ſuſpenſe that oppreſſed me, I approached the ſtranger.—' Sir Knight,' ſaid I, ' this ſecond viſit is probably occaſioned by your having ſomething to reveal to me; may I requeſt to ſee and know my viſiter, and then moſt willingly will I attend to all he has to ſay.'—

" At theſe words the Knight ſtood ſtill, and ſeemed deliberating whether or not he ſhould grant my requeſt. Again I beſought him to let me ſee his face. He ſtarted, and in a hollow voice uttered the word—' No!' Diſmayed by conduct ſo uncourteous, ſo unlike his former manners, I knew not how to proceed; but tortured as I was by the apprehenſion of ſome indefinite evil, I again ventured to addreſs him.—' Sir Knight,' ſaid I, ' from every circumſtance, I am convinced you are ſome ſuperior being, and are probably come to viſit me to inform me of ſome diſaſter to be avoided, or ſome error to be atoned for. If you will not allow me to ſee the perſon to whom I am ſo much obliged,

obliged, at leaſt let me entreat you to put an end to my ſuſpenſe, and reveal your meſſage.'—In the ſame hollow voice he now pronounced the following words—

'Beware of an alliance beyond the Alps! Fatal would it be to the houſe of Mirandola!'—

"As he ſpoke theſe words, his armour gradually fell off, and diſcloſed beneath it the rattling bones of a gigantic ſkeleton; at length even the bones themſelves ſeparated, and falling in a heap upon the floor, a ſelf-kindled fire conſumed them, and no trace of my viſiter remained, ſave a fragrant odour which aroſe from the aſhes."

---

Here ended the fragment, and a note upon it, in the ſame hand-writing that had tranſcribed and modernized it, mentioned that ſuch an alliance had lately taken place, the ſiſter of the Chief of the family having eſpouſed a Frenchman.—"What is to enſue,"

ensue," added the writer, "is yet in the bosom of futurity."

Sigismond looked around the chamber as he finished the fragment, and recollecting that these singular scenes had taken place in the room immediately adjoining his, felt a sensation, not wholly unlike fear, cross his mind; he thought his lamp gave scarcely any light, and holding it up to throw its feeble beams further across the chamber, strange forms seemed to his bewildered imagination to flit across the obscurity; but ashamed of yielding to such fanciful alarms, he trimmed his almost expiring lamp, and replenishing his fire, endeavoured to conquer the trepidation on his spirits: but not yet could he persuade himself to retire to bed. He arose, and taking his lamp, resolved once more to view the chamber where so extraordinary a visit had been paid. He easily unclosed the entrance; and as the rays of his lamp cast a faint light over the spacious chamber, he almost expected to see the gigantic figure of the Black Knight

gliding

gliding in the diſtance. He curiouſly examined the floor, and fancied he could even now diſcover the ſpot where the bones had conſumed themſelves by a ſpontaneous fire.

" Myſterious viſiter," ſaid Sigiſmond, internally, " whence and what wert thou? and what misfortunes cameſt thou to announce to the Houſe of Mirandola? Surely its murdered Chief has fulfilled the omen; for with him, probably, that fated race is extinct, unleſs in my Agnes it yet ſurvives! Oh ye gracious Powers, ſave her from the wrath of deſtiny! Let her unblemiſhed innocence be preſerved from the cruel fates that have involved her family!"

As he ſpoke, he fancied he ſaw a glimmering flame in a diſtant apartment, to which he had, in his preceding examination, left the doors open; and, alarmed by an appearance for which he was unable to account, he took up his lamp, and boldly advanced to diſcover what it was that bore ſo ſtrange an appearance. When he reached

the

the room, however, which was the laſt of the ſuite, there was no flame to be ſeen; all was utter darkneſs, ſave for the feeble glimmer of his lamp, and Sigiſmond bluſhed at the weakneſs of mind which had allowed imagination ſo to deceive him. Determined to conquer a ſenſation he was aſhamed to have felt, he placed his lamp on a magnificent marble table, and reſolved to diſplace one of the old ſhutters, which he could very eaſily do, and try to diſcover, as well as the darkneſs of the night would permit, to what part of the caſtle or courts the part of the edifice he was now in commanded the view. When he had ſucceeded in removing the ſhutters, he found, by the light which the ſtars afforded, that the windows looked into the ſame inner court he had remarked in his former obſervations. As he ſtood ſome time gazing on the ruinous condition of that part of the building, he was convinced he ſaw a light ſtream acroſs the court from the windows immediately under him. Theſe windows belonged to a ſuite of

apartments

apartments which he had certainly been told by Benedetto were in the ſame deſerted ſtate as thoſe he occupied; how then ſhould a light get there? for this was no illuſion of fancy; his eyes were ſtill fixed on it, as it continued ſtationary, ſtreaming in a long, narrow line over the high graſs and weeds, which waved to the blaſt. It occurred to him that it might perhaps be his own lamp—he, therefore, removed it to the next room; but when he returned to his ſtation, the light remained the ſame. With a heart palpitating with the hope of ſome diſcovery, perchance of ſome poor wretch confined in the ſame manner as himſelf, Sigiſmond reſolved to explore the lower apartments, when ſuddenly a noiſe, as of a low moaning, ſeemed to iſſue from the ſame room.

"Doubtleſs," ſaid he to himſelf, "this is ſome unfortunate victim of Rezzonico's policy, who is kept a priſoner as I am, and whom, perhaps, my ſteps have alarmed as much or more than his light and his groans have terrified me."

He

He hesitated a moment whether to purfue the enquiry that night, or defer it until the following day; when, reflecting how much society would lessen the misery of confinement, he determined to lose no time, but seizing his lamp, he proceeded to the passages leading to the stairs. When he had reached them, he found the steps ruinous, and even dangerous; but his resolution was formed—he resolved to proceed, and stepped with caution on loose and crumbling stones. As he advanced, the stairs suddenly diverged into two parts, and he was bewildered which to chuse; for as they had already wound in a spiral direction, he was uncertain which would carry him to the apartments he wished to explore. To decide, however, was necessary, and he followed that division that appeared the most safe. Here his passage was suddenly impeded by a door which seemed strong, and well fastened; and he was almost induced to return, and try the other staircase, when he fancied he heard the same low moaning

on

on the other ſide of the door, that had caught his attention in the rooms up ſtairs. He now placed his lamp out of the reach of the ſudden guſt of wind that might ruſh forth on opening the door; and having, after many trials, ſucceeded in uncloſing it, he faſtened it back by means of a hook, which ſeemed to have been placed for that purpoſe in the wall, and fetching his light, proceeded on his way.

As he advanced, the ſtairs became more narrow and more dangerous, and he felt convinced that he had choſen the diviſion that led to the ſubterranean dungeons; he even thought of returning, when his eye was caught by traces of blood on the wall and on the ſteps themſelves. At length his foot ſtumbled againſt ſomething which lay on the ſtairs, and ſtooping to examine, he diſcovered a parcel of bones; but the ſhuddering horror that ruſhed upon his mind prevented his examining whether or not they were human: ſomething, however, which ſparkled on the next ſtep attracted

his

his attention, and a ring of ſome value convinced him that the unfortunate bones had belonged to a human being. He took up the ring, and found it to be of diamonds, and traced on the golden circlet, were the well-known words "Faithful and Firm!"—Alas! was this then the ſkeleton of the murdered Mirandola? and if ſo, how came he here? and to what horrible ſuſpicions did not ſuch a circumſtance give riſe? Oppreſſed with a thouſand emotions, Sigiſmond found it impoſſible to purſue his enquiries any further that night, and carefully retraced his former way, and leaving the door open on the ſtaircaſe, felt ſomething like ſecurity when he had again reached the upper apartments. He haſtened to his own, having cautiouſly faſtened the outer doors of the ſuite, and ſeated himſelf by his almoſt expiring fire, which he renewed, determined more accurately to examine the ring he had found. Around the cluſter of diamonds were very neatly engraved "H. S. di Mirandola." This then was certainly either the uſual

name

name of the family; or the ring belonged to the same Marquis who had written the names of Henry Sebastian in the first leaf of the manuscript he had been examining.

Many circumstances concurred to convince Sigismond that Henry Sebastian was indeed the last possessor both of Voltorno and Poltalti; that he had fallen a sacrifice to murderers; that the ring had belonged to him; that he had collected together the written records of his family, and with his own hand had modernized and transcribed the singular story of the Knight in Black Armour, and his alarming prediction, which, in all probability, had been verified in his own person. Musing on circumstances so singular, and so coincident, Sigismond determined to prosecute the enquiry to the utmost of his power; and while he had the range of these apartments, to explore every part of them, convinced as he was, that to whatever purpose they had formerly been destined, they were now wholly deserted, except by occasional prisoners, like himself;

 and

and even of these Benedetto's account led him not to suppose there were any.

## CHAP. II.

"Lie thou there, my soul!
"Sleep—sleep upon it! Image not the form
"Of any dream but this, till time grows pregnant,
"And thou canst wake to vengeance!"

BROOKE.

WHEN the brilliant beams of the morning had dispersed the black vapours, which the strange scenes of the preceding night had gathered together in the heart of Sigismond, he felt a renewed desire to explore further the subterraneous apartments, on the stairs leading to which he had found what he believed to be the body of the last unfortunate

unfortunate Marquis di Mirandola; and ſince Prince Rezzonico had announced his intention not to return to Voltorno until late in that day, he concluded that when Benedetto had brought him proviſions and firing, he ſhould be left undiſturbed to proſecute the ſearch which ſo ſtrongly intereſted him. Nor did he wait long for the arrival of Benedetto; the old man ſeemed to conſider his attendance on Sigiſmond as an unwelcome duty, and was glad when he had performed it;—neither was Sigiſmond at all eager to detain him, ſince in the few ſhort converſations they had held together, he ſeemed very averſe to afford him any intelligence, though he was naturally loquacious. But, perhaps, as an inferior domeſtic, and by his own account, not a long reſident in the caſtle, he might not be able to communicate any information of conſequence; and vague reveries, and unfounded tales of horror, Sigiſmond was ill diſpoſed to attend to. Equally unwilling was he to betray, by any leading queſtion,

 the

the strong interest he really felt in the foregone history of the house of Mirandola, convinced as he was, that from a decided friend only would such conduct procure him any intelligence; from a faithful retainer of the Prince, he felt that it would only debar him from any hopes of obtaining even casual knowledge;--glad, therefore, was he, when Benedetto departed, and turning the key in the outermost lock, left his prisoner in security until the return of the Prince.

Sigismond hastened to avail himself of the species of liberty he now enjoyed, and preparing his lamp, passed through the upper apartments, and proceeded to the stairs he had descended the preceding night; but what was his surprise on coming to the door, which he had blamed himself for having inadvertently left hooked back, to find it again securely fastened! Some one then had been there since himself; and how vain was that security he flattered himself he enjoyed in those deserted apartments being locked in by distant fastenings! The agents of villany,

he

he could not doubt, had been on thoſe very ſtairs, and had prevented his further examination of the ſubterraneous cells. Diſmayed and diſcouraged, he almoſt reſolved to return to his own gloomy apartment, and relinquiſh a ſearch in which he was ſo unexpectedly impeded;—but a thouſand powerful motives impelled him to proceed; the poſſibility that ſome circumſtance might occur in thoſe gloomy vaults to prove whether or not the Marquis had really been the father of his Agnes, by what means thoſe bones had been myſteriouſly removed thither, when the Marquis was ſaid to have received his death in the neighbourhood of Pontalti,—nay, poſſibly ſomething might throw a light on the myſtery of his own origin,—and, impelled by theſe ideas, he endeavoured to uncloſe the door; but the faſtenings were more effectual than they had been the preceding night, and he was, however reluctantly, compelled to relinquiſh this part of his project. The other diviſion of the ſtairs was, however, ſtill open

open to him, and he determined to prosecute that enquiry, and discover, if possible, what light he had observed the night before streaming from those windows across the lower courts; though if those subterraneous apartments still continued to be visited, as he could no longer doubt, the light was easy to be accounted for, and he should, perhaps, incur some personal risk by endeavouring to explore the mystery; but, separated as he was from Agnes, and as he feared for ever, personal danger could but little influence him, and he boldly descended the other division of the stairs.

He easily found the apartments which, as he had conjectured, exactly corresponded with those above; but where he found nothing to gratify curiosity, or to excite suspicion. No vestige of inhabitation appeared, nor could he discover any thing that might assist his conjectures respecting the mysterious light; all too was still and silent as the grave, and though he carried his lamp, it was insufficient to illuminate the apartments, whose

whoſe windows were cloſed by ſhutters, of which the ivy, and various other creepers, almoſt wholly overſhadowed the crevices— a circumſtance which would have rendered it impoſſible for Sigiſmond, even had he wiſhed it, to have admitted the cheerful light of day into theſe long-deſerted apartments.

Fatigued and diſappointed, Sigiſmond returned to his own ſtory, when in his way obſerving a narrow ſtone ſtaircaſe, which probably led to the upper part of the turret, he reſolved to explore that alſo, which ſeemed, by the heavy and well-faſtened ſtone door, tolerably well ſecured from any intruſion. As he aſcended, the crumbling ſtairs made his way unſafe, and he was almoſt tempted to regain his own chamber, when a trace of blood on the wall caught his eye, and he diſtinctly ſaw the form of a hand imprinted in that ſanguinary ſtream on the ſtone; it was apparently a very old mark, but it arouſed his almoſt dormant

 curioſity;

curiofity; he eagerly continued mounting, cafting a fearful eye of enquiry around.

"Murder then," fighed he to himfelf, "has been bufied here alfo!"

As he advanced, he perceived the ftairs terminated by a low grated door, which he unclofed without much difficulty. The room was open to the country by four windows, to the four points of Heaven, and for a moment the attention of Sigifmond was engaged by the varied landfcapes of beauty and fublimity that caught his eye:—but not long did he gaze on the fertile and enchanting bofom of Nature; his thoughts were painfully recalled to the detefted traits of malignant man, which the walls of this chamber fupplied; infcriptions covered them, traced apparently by a feeble hand, but expreffive of anguifh and indignation, and which failed not to communicate thofe fentiments to the bofom of Sigifmond. He eagerly read thofe varied expreffions of horror and defpair, and in fome of thofe unfteady characters, recognized the hand of the

the ſame man who had tranſcribed the narrative of the Knight in Black Armour. What horrible ideas now ruſhed on his mind! Had then that unfortunate Mirandola been a priſoner here? and for what dreadful purpoſe?—The terror of the inſcriptions left ſcarcely a doubt. One was—"Treachery has brought me hither! Malice and ambition will leave me here to die!"

Another.—"In my own caſtle denied the bare comforts of life!—a prey to the moſt horrible deſpair!"

"Alas! my wife, my child, where are ye in theſe moments? What dreadful deſtiny is reſerved for ye?"

"Oh miſguided Agnes! was it then for you to open the whole ſtore of woes on your afflicted houſe?"

"Alas! my horrid fate will ſoon be accompliſhed! Yet Nature has healed my wounds! By what means, then, will my cruel perſecutors complete their work?"——

There were many others of ſimilar tenor, and many illegible from the effects of time

 and

and damp; but Sigiſmond could not doubt, from thoſe he had deciphered, but that the Marquis had fallen a victim in that very caſtle, perhaps to its preſent poſſeſſor. Oh horrible! To enſure, then, his ſucceſſion, had Rezzonico dared to deſtroy him! And Sigiſmond was now himſelf in the power of that very being, and confined in that very part of the caſtle which had, doubtleſs, witneſſed ſo many horrible crimes!—Struck with a conviction of the fate to which he was himſelf reſerved, ſhuddering at the dreadful anguiſh the wretched Marquis had ſuffered, he remained in the turret, unconſcious of the flight of time, till the ſound of a diſtant horn arouſed him. It might be the Prince returning from the chace, and his longer ſtay in the turret would be extremely imprudent. He deſcended in haſte, and carefully cloſing every door he had opened to proſecute his ſearch, reached his own apartment in ſafety.

Here, with haſty ſteps traverſing the corridor, his mind found "food for meditation

even

even to madneſs." The Marquis had then left a widow and a child, and the mention of Agnes in a ſubſequent inſcription, left him no doubt as to Madame St. Clair and Agnes being thoſe unfortunate ſurvivors. Yet to what could the word "miſguided" allude? If Madame St. Clair had been in reality the Marchioneſs Mirandola, her own hiſtory, as he had learnt it from Buonafede, muſt have been fabricated rather with a view to conceal than to illuſtrate the truth; and he believed he could eaſily trace the motive which ſhould induce her to wiſh for ſuch concealment, leſt by any imprudence Rezzonico ſhould diſcover that the innocent daughter and rightful heireſs of Mirandola ſurvived, whom his malice and ambition would prompt him to perſecute unceaſingly.

It then occurred to Sigiſmond that the Prince had formerly diſcovered the name this unhappy widow had aſſumed, by the ſurpriſe he expreſſed when he learnt

that Madame St. Clair had been reſident at Salviati.

"If ſo," thought Sigiſmond, "I have been myſelf the fatal means of betraying to Rezzonico not only that ſhe ſtill ſurvives, but even, if my imprudent letter to Buonafedo did fall into his hands, of aſcertaining to him her actual reſidence; and thus have I at once involved her fate and my own in irremediable darkneſs. Rezzonico, cool, implacable, and artful, will eaſily plan ſome mode of getting her into his power; and no force or ſkill will ever after diſcover her deſtiny. Oh! wretch that I am, thus to have plunged her into the deepeſt abyſs of miſery!"

Yet, on further conſideration, the word "miſguided" afforded him ſome conſolation. Agnes had, undoubtedly, been the name of Madame St. Clair, and if her ſtory had been true, the epithet applied to her; but what then was the connexion between her and Mirandola? No, he returned to the former painful explanation of the

myſteries

myſteries that ſurrounded him—a conſideration which heightened his averſion to Rezzonico, and increaſed his terrors for himſelf, doubled as they were to him by a ſenſe of his own miſconduct. Loſt as he was in painful meditation, he yet reſolved on ſome future night to attempt again to explore the ſubterraneous cells; convinced that the bones he had ſeen, had once belonged to the unfortunate Marquis, whoſe deſpairing inſcriptions on the walls of the upper turret had ſo deeply impreſſed his mind, he thought it probable that he ſhould find ſome veſtige of him below, ſince it appeared evident that he had not periſhed in the turret: and more eager for the ſearch ſince the diſcovery in the upper chamber, Sigiſmond lamented the new obſtacle thrown in his way by the recloſing of the door. While he was meditating on theſe perplexing ſubjects, he heard the bolts of his gallery-door undrawn, and beheld Ghiberti, who approached him with a ſmile of benevolence that almoſt determined

Sigiſmond

Sigiſmond to repoſe full confidence in him.

" Young Signor," ſaid the good man, " I am come to ſummon you to the Prince, who is returned. Oh! how I grieved that I was not permitted yeſterday to return to you with the Prince's anſwer!"

" I will attend him," anſwered Sigiſmond; " but I wiſh it were poſſible for me firſt, Ghiberti, to aſk thee ſome queſtions."

" Moſt willingly," replied Ghiberti, " would I anſwer them, were I now allowed to ſtay; but his Highneſs expects you immediately in the oak parlour."

" Tell me in one word, Ghiberti," ſaid Sigiſmond, " as we walk along—tell me if you knew my father?"

" No, Signor, on my honour," replied the old man.

" Nor do you not know of any one of Prince Rezzonico's friends who has died lately?"

" No, Signor, not one," anſwered Ghiberti.

" What

" What am I then to conclude?" ſaid Sigiſmond.

" Alas, Signor!" ſaid Ghiberti, " I ſcarcely dare tell even you that—but—huſh!—I will come to you at night, Signor; I believe I may venture."

" If you mean that you may rely on my diſcretion, Ghiberti," replied Sigiſmond, " you certainly may; you ſhall never ſuffer from what you may unfold to me."

" I do believe you, Signor" ſaid Ghiberti, " but theſe rooms are ſolitary of a night."

" They will, however," obſerved Sigiſmond, " be leſs ſolitary when you and I are together in them, than they have been to me theſe two nights that I have ſlept here."

" True," replied Ghiberti; " and have you ſlept well, Signor?"

" Perfectly ſo, my good friend," replied the youth.

" Ah, Signor!" remarked Ghiberti, " you are young and ſtrong, and your conſcience is untouched."

"So is your's, Ghiberti," said he, "though you are older than I am."

"Why, yes, Signor, to be sure," said the old man, "my conscience is no worse than my neighbour's;—nay, I wish all my neighbours had as good a one as I have; but somehow I can't help feeling a little fearful of a night in those apartments;—but I'll come, however."

This dialogue brought them to the door of the oak parlour, where Ghiberti left him, and Sigismond on entering, found the whole party assembled, with the addition of a priest, who was announced to Sigismond as Father Regolo Carucci. Repulsive as every member of the party had already been to Sigismond, he thought he felt still more repugnance towards Carucci, than towards any of the others. A face of the most consummate art seemed to cover a heart capable of devising any villany, however complicated; and the silver locks that hung from under his calotte, instead of giving a venerable air to his figure, seemed but the finishing

finiſhing mark of hypocriſy. He immediately approached Sigiſmond, and with a ſmooth tone, and inſinuating manner, began to talk to him, and ſeemed to devote himſelf entirely to him; but it was with difficulty Sigiſmond could repay his courteſy with civility, and as he inceſſantly watched an opportunity of ſpeaking to Prince Rezzonico, without being obſerved by the whole party, he at length found a moment to ſay to him—" Monſignor, before you ſet out yeſterday for the chace, I ſignified to you, by Ghiberti, my wiſh for a private conference; can you now fix an hour when you can allow me one?"

" And what occaſion," demanded Rezzonico, " can there be for a private conference?—When I have any commands for you, I ſhall find means of making my will known to you, and you can hardly have any ſecret commands for me."

" There are many things, my Prince," ſaid Sigiſmond, " about which I wiſh to be informed."

No

"No matter, Sir," interrupted Rezzonico, "it may be I ſhould not chuſe to give you information; beſides, what you wiſh to aſk, aſk now,—theſe gentlemen are my friends."

"Perhaps ſo, Signor," anſwered Sigiſmond; "but there are ſubjects which it is impoſſible to diſcuſs in company."

"It will be impoſſible to diſcuſs them in private for ſome time," replied the Prince; "to-morrow I accompany Count Ubaldo to Venice, where I ſhall ſtay ſome time; you, in the meanwhile, will remain here."

"And to what purpoſe, Signor?" aſked Sigiſmond.

"To what purpoſe!" exclaimed Rezzonico; "you will ſtay here becauſe it is my will."

"Signor," ſaid the youth, "remember my ſituation! Torn abruptly from all I have ever known and valued, under the idea of finding my father and my name, I find myſelf kept a priſoner, debarred from ſociety, allowed no means of inveſtigating the

myſtery

myſtery that hangs over me, nor even any means of amuſement!—Confined in a deſolate apartment, deprived of the free air, treated like a criminal—what have I done to merit ſuch puniſhment?"

"What degree of liberty," enquired Rezzonico, "would you take in a private conference, if you allow your tongue this licence before friends? Do you dare to remonſtrate with me on my conduct? Learn, Sir, that my will is abſolute here, and that any attempt to rebel againſt, or to evade it, will be attended with the moſt terrible conſequences."

"And when, Signor, ſhall I be permitted," reſumed Sigiſmond, "to enquire after that father who died ſo lately?—I ſee no ſymptoms here of mourning for him."

"You ſhall know all this time enough," replied the Prince; "I will be queſtioned no more;—whence gained you this unconquerable aſſurance?"

"Nay, Signor," anſwered the youth, "you muſt not wonder to find me thus:

I have

I have promifed ever to prove myfelf faithful and firm!"

Sigifmond here turned an undaunted eye on the Prince, whofe colour fled for a moment; but refuming his natural haughtinefs, he faid—" 'Tis well, Sir—be faithful and firm in a good caufe; but remember, when thofe principles lead you to rebel againft fuperior authority, they become boldnefs and obftinacy. You are here not to queftion, but to obey; and after a proper probation, and at a proper moment, you fhall be inftructed in all the particulars neceffary for you to know; in the meanwhile, interrupt me no more."

And with thefe words the Prince turned from him, and joined the company, who perceiving him in earneft converfation with Sigifmond, had formed themfelves into a party at a diftant quarter of the room; though from time to time Sigifmond, even during the conference with Rezzonico, perceived himfelf the object of fome very fpeaking glances from Vitalba. During the

the mingled converfations of the evening this man frequently furveyed, with a deep, impreffive gaze, the countenance and figure of Sigifmond, who fhrunk from his obfervation nearly as much as from the abhorrent countenance of the Monk, and the unwelcome vivacity of Pigliani; yet, as they were infenfibly warmed by talk and wine, wit and gaiety predominated in their manners, and had his heart been at eafe, Sigifmond would have been amufed with tracing the different characters that prompted fuch various modes of merriment: that of Pigliani was the moft diffipated, the moft refined, the moft catching; with every appearance of levity and opennefs, he never for a moment loft fight of the trueft elegance of manner, or dignity of character. The mirth of Valenti was that of an untaught boy, grofs, rude, and uninterefting; while Carucci difgufted every thinking mind by the readinefs with which he lent himfelf to all the coarfe jokes of Ubaldo on his habit and profeffion, and the willingnefs with

with which he himſelf mingled the loweſt ribaldry with the moſt common-place ſarcaſms on his Order. The Prince and Vitalba ſeemed rather to permit than to ſhare in the gaiety of the company; and Rezzonico in particular turned from time to time an angry and thoughtful look at Sigiſmond, who rarely replied even to the lively ſpeeches addreſſed to him. At length, without attracting obſervation, the Prince approached him, and ſaid in a low voice—"You reproached me with debarring you from ſociety; are you of a diſpoſition to enjoy it? Why do you not now mingle in the gaiety around you? You are not now in your deſolate room."

But he waited for no reply, and Sigiſmond felt not leſs embarraſſed for this reproof. Young Valenti tried in vain to induce Sigiſmond to be mirthful, and at length in diſguſt and hopeleſneſs gave up the attempt; but the ſteady attention of Vitalba diſconcerted the youth extremely, and he felt himſelf more than ever at a loſs

when

when Vitalba whiſpered to him as he paſſed —" I mean to viſit you at night."

Not another word did he addreſs to him, nor allow him time to make any reply. What could this myſterious viſit, thus myſteriouſly announced, import? Was Vitalba his friend or his enemy? He felt in himſelf no diſpoſition to repoſe any confidence in Vitalba, and he determined to be cautious in the interview that was to take place: but would he not meet Ghiberti there? Ghiberti, ſo much his friend, and who had ſo much to impart. Ghiberti too, would probably accompany his Lord on the morrow to Venice, and he ſhould have no opportunity of obtaining any further conference with him. Nor would it be poſſible to perſuade Ghiberti to retire into any of the inner rooms during his converſation with Vitalba; his fears would ſcarcely allow him to remain with him, either in his own chamber or in the corridor.

Filled with perplexity, Sigiſmond earneſtly hoped he ſhould be able to give Ghiberti a

ſignal

ſignal that would prevent his meeting with Vitalba, yet feared he ſhould ſee nothing of him till the moment of his coming to the chamber-door; and if this ſhould happen while Vitalba was there, what would the Signor think of a nightly conference with a ſervant.

He was now rouſed from his reverie by the entrance of Benedetto with refreſhments, of which all the Signors roſe to partake; and contriving to place himſelf near Vitalba, he ſaid—"To what am I indebted for the honour of your viſit?"

"To my wiſh to ſerve you," replied Vitalba, in a low voice; "I have much to communicate; be alone."

"At what hour?" enquired Sigiſmond.

"That I cannot fix," anſwered Vitalba; "but not until all are loſt in ſleep."

More could not paſs unobſerved; and Sigiſmond addreſſed a few words to Pigliani, not to appear particular in ſpeaking to Vitalba, and ſoon after ſome of the party retired for the night. Among theſe were

Count

Count Ubaldo and his ſon, and Sigiſmond. Pigliani, Carucci, and Vitalba remained in the oak parlour with the Prince, and Sigiſmond hoped that Ghiberti would arrive before Vitalba would think of coming. Hour after hour however elapſed, and Ghiberti came not; then it occurred to Sigiſmond that he, being immediately about the perſon of Rezzonico, could not poſſibly come until his maſter had diſmiſſed him for the night, and this made it more probable that he and the Signor would meet.

Often did Sigiſmond go to the end of the corridor to watch for approaching footſteps; but he was ſo diſtant from the inhabited part of the houſe, that not the lighteſt murmur reached his ear; and he continued pacing up and down the corridor in watchful agitation. At length the great clock tolled the hour of one, and he began to imagine that both Ghiberti and Vitalba had forgotten their appointments, and almoſt determined to retire to bed, though his ſpirits were too much on the alarm to allow him

to think of ſleep, when he thought he diſtinguiſhed an approaching footſtep; he liſtened, and found he was not deceived. Oh that it might but be Ghiberti, whom he could inſtantly diſmiſs! The perſon approached the door, undrew the bolts, and opening it, Sigiſmond beheld Vitalba; he was conducted by old Benedetto, who inſtantly retired.

"I fear, my young friend," Vitalba began, "you have thought me tedious in fulfilling my promiſe; but the Prince is but this inſtant retired, and it is now ſo late that I ſhould not have been ſurpriſed had you given up all hope of ſeeing me."

"I fear, Signor," replied Sigiſmond, "that you will ſuffer now from the loſs of your reſt; had you not better defer till to-morrow the conference you have promiſed me?"

"I thank you for your attention," anſwered Vitalba, "but to-morrow we leave this place too early to allow me any time to ſpeak with you, and I would willingly explain myſelf to you. You muſt be anxious

to

to clear up the myſteries in which Prince Rezzonico has involved your birth; will you be ingenuous with me, and tell me what ſurmiſes you have formed on the ſubject?"

"In truth," replied Sigiſmond, "I have formed none. Wholly without a clue, I have not known what to conjecture; and the ſingular circumſtance of my quitting Colano with the idea of being brought to my father, then ere my arrival here learning that he was dead, and ſince I have been here, finding no trace of any recent death, does, I own, bewilder me moſt extremely. If you, Signor, can and will clear up this myſtery, I own you will extremely oblige me."

"You have yet ſeen but little of the Prince," ſaid Vitalba, "but the little you have ſeen, muſt have enabled you to judge that he is of a moſt impenetrable character: even I, who have lived in habits of intimacy with him for many years, am unable to comprehend him fully. Sometimes I am inclined to think him a man of the ſtricteſt

 honour,

honour, and fometimes I am almoft doubtful whether his confcience be not loaded with fome enormous crime.—Tell me, young Signor, do your obfervations correfpond with mine?"

Sigifmond, doubtful of Vitalba, whofe countenance he could not help diftrufting, did not like to commit himfelf by a free avowal of his fentiments; he therefore replied cautioufly,—"I have, as you obferve, Signor Vitalba, had too few opportunities of remarking the character of the Prince, and during the fhort time I have been with him, my mind has been too completely occupied about my own immediate affairs, to enable me to form any judgment at all of him, even if at my age, and with my want of experience, I could, with all opportunities, be capable of deciding at all accurately concerning a character which you yourfelf acknowledge is difficult to be fathomed."

"I approve of your modefty and diffidence, Sigifmond," replied the Signor, "but

"but whether you rely on your own judgment or not, there is an internal voice in every man's bosom which will make itself heard, and which has, without doubt, whispered to you that the Prince is not your friend:—tell me honestly, has not this idea occurred to you?"

More embarrassed than before, Sigismond knew not what to reply; and reflecting on the extreme imprudence there would be in disclosing the real feelings of his heart to a man who, like Vitalba, had been for hours discoursing with the Prince immediately previous to this conference, and who had been living in habits of friendship with him for many years; moreover, not feeling inclined to believe, from the character of Vitalba's countenance, that he was of a disposition to feel an immediate and warm prepossession in favour of a youth like him, he merely said—"To what do these enquiries tend, Signor? I understood you had much to communicate—I have nothing to communicate."

 "I can-

"I cannot blame the cautious prudence of your character," replied Vitalba, "though it is not exactly what I should have expected from your countenance, nor exactly what one best loves in youth. I had felt a strong preference for you, young man, but a mind so guarded is equal to combat alone those difficulties which surround you: had you wanted a friend, I was ready to have been that friend, but you do not need one."

"I am sorry to have offended you, Signor," said Sigismond, "and if you really see me surrounded by difficulties——"

"Hark!" interrupted Vitalba, "what noise is that?"

"'Tis nothing, I believe," replied Sigismond, "but the wind."

"It is surely some person approaching," resumed Vitalba.

"Sigismond listened, but could not distinguish any footsteps; he therefore trusted it was not Ghiberti, and merely said he fancied not. While he yet spoke, however, he heard a light and cautious tread along the

the gallery, and obſerved the countenance of Vitalba grow paler.

" Is it nothing, do you ſay?" ſaid Vitalba.

And at that inſtant Ghiberti partly unclоſed the door of the room, and whiſpered —" Are you aſleep, Signor?"

" It is Ghiberti," ſaid Sigiſmond, riſing boldly, " who uſually brings me firing when his maſter has diſmiſſed him."

" Ah, you are not gone to bed," ſaid Ghiberti; " I thought you would be tired of waiting for me."—And entering, he perceived Vitalba, who, turning to Sigiſmond, ſaid, with a ſneer of malignant contempt, —" Theſe then are the counſellors you prefer. I can now account for the readineſs with which you would have waved my offered viſit, and for the reluctance you felt to unfold yourſelf to me. This predilection for a menial, however, fully does away all the viſions of high birth with which I was about to raiſe your ideas. The propenſities of your mind ſufficiently declare its origin.

 But

But before I leave you, young man, I inſiſt on knowing for what purpoſe was this nocturnal viſit—what precious councils were ye to have together?"

"I have already ſaid, Signor," replied Sigiſmond, "that Ghiberti uſually brings me wood when his maſter has diſmiſſed him; why he is now without it, is not difficult to imagine, when one recollects the lateneſs of the hour, and the probability that I ſhould have been aſleep, which, but for your promiſed viſit, I certainly ſhould."

"This is a very coherent tale," reſumed Vitalba, "but I confeſs it meets not with very ready belief in my boſom; however, young man, I ſhall deprive you of your privy-counſellor, and leave you to enjoy in ſolitude the happy reflections on your diſappointment, and the diſcovery I have made."

Vitalba here roſe, and commanded Ghiberti to follow him. The poor man, pale, trembling, and diſmayed, confirmed, by too eloquent a countenance, the ſuſpicions of the

the Signor, who, turning to ſurvey the chamber, caſt his eyes on the picture of the Marquis Mirandola, and the trophy of arms beneath it, which Sigiſmond had placed. He ſtarted, and for a moment an aſhy paleneſs croſſed his cheek.

"How came that portrait there?" ſaid he, ſternly addreſſing Ghiberti; "I thought by the Prince's orders it had been long ago removed."

"It was ſo," replied Ghiberti.

"By what means then came it there?" repeated Vitalba.

"Signor, I know not," anſwered the trembling Ghiberti.

"Notwithſtanding all the tales your credulity publiſhes," reſumed Vitalba, "it placed not itſelf there."

"I placed it there," ſaid Sigiſmond.

"And from what motive, pray?" ſaid Vitalba.

"Of my motives, Signor," replied Sigiſmond, "I am not bound to give you any account."

"You are haughty, young man," resumed the Signor; "but though you reject my friendſhip, I will give you one caution, which you will find it for your intereſt to attend to. With whatever ſilly tales the ignorant loquacity of your choſen friends may chance to fill your head, beware how you give credit to them. You will, perhaps, one day learn the hiſtory of the Houſe of Mirandola; you will learn it too ſoon for your peace; and remember, whoever you may hereafter prove to be, you are at preſent ſubject to the will of Prince Rezzonico, and it is not by tampering with his ſervants, or acting in contempt of his orders, that you will obtain his favour.—Ghiberti, follow me!"

Poor Ghiberti, extremely diſconcerted, caſt an eye of deſpondency on Sigiſmond, who, now left wholly to himſelf, felt a whirl of emotions that allowed him not for a while to reflect coolly on the ſtrange betrayal Vitalba had made of the meanneſs and duplicity of his character. At firſt he could

feel

feel only regret for the prevention of his promised conference with Ghiberti, from which he had hoped to learn so many particulars, about which he felt the strongest interest; but as by degrees this regret wore away, he foresaw the worst consequences from Vitalba's suspicions of the subject of Ghiberti's intended conversation. Yet a faint hope remained that the old man would find means again to elude the vigilance of Vitalba, and would pay him another visit; but hour after hour elapsed, and no footstep broke on the silence of the night, till at length the dawning sun peeped through the casements of his chamber, and Sigismond abandoned himself to despair. There was now no chance of his seeing Ghiberti, who always attended his master; and from the report of Vitalba, it was to be feared that his confinement would be rendered more unpleasant than it had already been: and the curiosity and interest he had involuntarily betrayed respecting the House of Mirandola, would lead the cautious Prince to prevent his pursuing

his ſearch any further over the deſerted apartments.

While Sigiſmond, after a wholly ſleepleſs night, was watching from one of the high caſements the gradual advancement of the ſun, and the diſperſion of the vapours of the night, he at length heard the ſound of a ſtep on the ſtaircaſe, and his heart palpitated leſt it ſhould be either the Prince or Vitalba. It was, however, Ghiberti, who, ſtill pale and trembling, ſaid in a low and hurried voice—" Oh Signor! I have not a moment to converſe with you; I fear even now I am watched, but I could not help coming to you before I ſet out for Venice, juſt to tell you that Signor Vitalba went immediately from you to my Lord the Prince, that they remained conferring a conſiderable time, during which I was detained in an inner room: after a while, Signor Vitalba went himſelf to call in Father Regolo Carucci, and they talked on and on, that I thought they would not go to bed at all. I tried once or twice to liſten, but I could

I could not catch a word—they ſpoke ſo low, and were ſo far from the door; but let me beg of you, Signor, not to truſt at all to that Monk—Oh, how different he is from good Father Bertoldo!—By the bye, Signor, I am not quite ſure that that dear Father is dead; there is one in the caſtle who ſays he is not dead, only confined or ſent away."

"Who is it ſays ſo, Ghiberti?" demanded Sigiſmond. "Is it any of the houſehold that are to remain behind?"

"Why yes, Signor, it is Federico, who ſtays with Benedetto; and in truth, Signor, I do not know but Federico might be much your friend, if he could but be perſuaded to venture hither; he has lived in this caſtle a long, long while, and knows a good deal; and ſo did old Pietro that's gone away. But indeed, Signor, I muſt be gone; I would not have it known for the world that I have been here."

"Only juſt tell me," ſaid Sigiſmond, "how I might know Federico, in caſe I ſhould happen to meet him."

"Nay,

"Nay, Signor," replied Ghiberti, "you cannot fail of knowing him, for there will be only he and Benedetto left; and besides, he has a remarkable gash across his forehead."

"Enough," said Sigismond; "and now, good Ghiberti, let me not detain you; I tremble lest your visit here should be discovered."

Ghiberti recommended the youth to all the saints on his bead-roll, and departed; and Sigismond had the happiness of hearing him go quite down the stairs, so that he came into the usually inhabited part of the house without meeting any one.

After nearly an hour had elapsed, old Benedetto came as usual with provisions and fuel, saying, his Lord was gone, and had desired that Sigismond might remain in those apartments.

Sigismond forbore to remonstrate with Benedetto, who had no power to alter any of the directions his Lord had left to be

obeyed,

obeyed, and merely asked how long the Prince was likely to be absent.

"That is a question utterly impossible to be answered," said Benedetto; "when my Lord goes to Venice, we never can guess at the period of his return. But, Signor, you won't be quite lonesome; for the holy Father Regolo Carucci will be here great part, if not the whole of the time."

"Has Father Regolo long been the Confessor of this house?" asked Sigismond, carelessly.

"No, Signor," replied Benedètto, "only since we lost Father Bertoldo.—Oh, this Carucci is a different man from Bertoldo, I promise you. Bertoldo, poor soul, was always fasting and praying, and so humble, mean-spirited, I used to think; but Father Regolo has the air of a Prince, and calls the servants about as though he had always been used to command; and then his manner is so gay, that unless you look at his habit, you'd never think him a Priest. He'll come

come and visit you by and by, Signor; so do not let your spirits get low."

"No, no, never fear," replied Sigismond. And Benedetto departed.

The promise of a visit from the ghostly Father, whom Benedetto represented as so gay and jolly, was by no means an exhilarating circumstance to Sigismond, who would far rather have had his day undisturbed, and have employed it in searching further amid the ruins for some memorials of the Marquis di Mirandola. Obliged as he was, however, to remain in his prison until the arrival of Carucci, he endeavoured to arm himself with patience; and reflecting that in those subterraneous passages which he was now most earnest to explore, the night was the same as the day, he resolved to defer until the quietness of midnight, an enquiry into what had probably been the death-bed of Mirandola. He continued then walking along the corridor, until he began to imagine that the Friar would not pay him this promised visit, and endeavoured once more to amuse

amuſe himſelf with the manuſcript: but his thoughts wandered far away to Colano, to Salviati; he ſaw his beloved friends overwhelmed with ſorrow for his abſence; and then, ſuffering his fancy to be weighed down with ſtill more gloomy ideas, he beheld Agnes dragged from her Convent at the orders of Rezzorico, and carried he knew not whither: he imagined her given by the Prince as a reward to ſome of his followers; or ſometimes he imagined her murdered, in order to ſecure her from ever claiming the honours of that Houſe of which he believed her the ſole ſurviving heireſs. Loſt in theſe gloomy meditations, the arrival of Carucci was peculiarly unwelcome to him; and the fawning kindneſs of the Prieſt, whom he ſaw with diſtruſt and abhorrence, made him ſhudder when he reflected that this man was now maſter in Voltorno, and might have many charges reſpecting himſelf which he doubted not but he would execute.

The Prieſt, with a ſtudied courteſy, bade him good-morrow, and in all his diſcourſe artfully

artfully interwove hints of the peculiar gratitude which Sigiſmond owed to Prince Rezzonico for withdrawing him from the obſcurity in which he had hitherto lived, and enabling him hereafter to claim the honours of an illuſtrious Houſe.

"Hitherto," replied Sigiſmond, "my ſituation has been but little improved by this boaſted goodneſs; at Colano I was free, at Voltorno I am a priſoner; nor have I obtained the ſlighteſt clue by which to judge of theſe connexions which are ſaid to promiſe ſo much ſplendour."

"Patience, young Signor," replied Carucci; "your fate is wholly in the Prince's hands, and he demands only a proper probation ere he exalts you to the rank to which your birth entitles you. But he inſiſts on your ſupporting that trial; nor can you imagine either what ſplendour awaits you at the end of that time, or how wholly you are in the power of the Prince;—he alone poſſeſſes the ſecret of your birth—he alone can raiſe you to its privileges, and

with

with him alone it rests to involve you in tenfold obscurity if your conduct seems to him unworthy of your future rank."

"By what mysterious connexion," cried Sigismond, "has the Prince so absolute a dominion over me?"

"It rests not with me," answered Carucci, "to explain to you the causes of that power which Monsignor the Prince certainly possesses over your destiny; were it permitted me, I undoubtedly would gratify a curiosity so natural. You cannot fail of being anxious concerning a destiny so involved in obscurity, and I wish I were allowed to dissipate the mystery."

"You comprehend it then?" said Sigismond.

An assenting bow from the Monk was his sole answer.

"And you know, perhaps," resumed Sigismond, "the truth of my father's fate, whom I was brought hither to see, and who, as I was told, died during my journey; yet, since

ſince my arrival here, I have obſerved no traces of his ſudden departure."

"I marvel not," replied the Prieſt, "at the ſpirit of enquiry theſe conſiderations ſo warmly ſuggeſt, nor do I blame the ardour of your character; but, my dear young Signor, reſtrain your impatience; Prince Rezzonico, at his own time, will clear up theſe apparent myſteries, and place you in the ſtation for which the vigour of your ſoul declares you born: but in the meanwhile, patience and forbearance muſt be your guides to this high eminence, and quiet ſubmiſſion to the will of the Prince. I ſhall endeavour, while I am here, to lighten to you the oppreſſive weight of your captivity, as I am convinced you will not abuſe the indulgence I ſhall allow you; and truſt that my ſociety will induce you to viſit the uſually inhabited part of the caſtle, where every attention ſhall be ſhewn to you. There is a good library of books, from whence you can ſelect any you chuſe for the

amuſement

amuſement of thoſe hours you may ſtill wiſh to paſs in ſolitude."

Sigiſmond reflected that it was not his intereſt to offend this Monk, who ſeemed diſpoſed to uſe the moſt ſervile civility towards him; and further thought that the liberty of viſiting the common parts of the edifice, would enable him to ſee and talk with Federico: The permiſſion to uſe the library was undoubtedly a privilege peculiarly gratifying to him, and he accordingly framed an anſwer of civil thanks to Carucci, who, though he inſpired him with a diſlike amounting to abhorrence, yet ſeemed inclined to be on the beſt terms. There was no need, in accepting this proffered civility, to commit himſelf by any imprudence; and he promiſed, therefore, to wait upon the Monk in the oak parlour, the uſual rendezvous of the family.

The Monk now, croſſing himſelf, retired, as he ſaid, to the oratory; and Sigiſmond debated whether he ſhould, in this interval, pay a viſit to the turret, or not: but reflecting

that, from ſome circumſtances, it appeared that the Monk would not wholly reſide at Voltorno, he determined to forbear his further intended ſearch during his ſtay, and amuſed himſelf in his own apartment with the books he had conveyed thither from the Marquis's bed-room. At length he judged it proper to go down to the oppoſite ſide of the caſtle; and finding his gallery door unlocked, advanced with a ſort of trembling haſte along the intricate paſſages, hoping to ſee Federico, whom he thought he ſhould know by the deſcription Ghiberti had given him. As he proceeded, he ſaw at a diſtance a tall, gaunt figure, who certainly was not Benedetto; and eagerly haſtening forward to obtain a view of the countenance of the man who might perchance be a friend to him, the perſon ſeemed to fly before him. As Sigiſmond, however, rather gained upon him, the noiſe of his footſteps cauſed the other to look round, and he beheld a face impreſſed with the deepeſt marks of malevolence, brutality, and ferocity.

"Surely,"

"Surely," thought he, "this cannot be Federico; yet Ghiberti assured me there was no one else left."

The person, however, gazed for a moment on the face of Sigismond, and hastily advancing among the windings of the passages, was lost before the scar on his forehead could enable the youth to ascertain his identity.

Struck with a dismay for which he could not account, Sigismond felt half inclined to return to the fancied security of his own apartment. Hired ruffians, savage banditti darted into his imagination; the stranger bore the very countenance of a murderer, and he felt himself the object of some terrible design, of which he neither knew the aim, nor the mode of execution. To be continually on his guard would avail him little, since in such a castle as Voltorno, no place could be safe against the designs of those who were acquainted with the building, nor could any caution enable him to elude designs of which he could surmise nothing definite.

definite. With these alarms full in his head, he determined at length to proceed to the oak parlour.

## CHAP. III.

"To edge suspended vengeance art thou come?"

WALPOLE.

IN the oak parlour Sigismond found Father Regolo, who received him with every appearance of cordiality and friendship, although the youth was scarcely able to conceal the strong impressions of terror the late rencontre had left upon his mind; nor dared he place the least confidence in the semblance of kindness assumed by a man who, perhaps, had at that very moment a ruffian under the same room, engaged to perpetrate a crime for which he could imagine no cause.

When

When dinner was served, Sigismond looked eagerly at the attendants, to discover whether the person he had seen in his way from the east gallery, were or were not Federico. The man who waited wore a different garb from the figure that had so dismayed him, and occupied by his business, he continued some time in such a position that Sigismond could not distinguish his face; his tall, bony figure appeared nearly similar, and at length he disclosed the same horrible countenance that had struck the youth with so terrible an impression. Relieved, however, from his immediate fear of assassination, by finding that the person who had occasioned it was a domestic of the castle, Sigismond now wondered how Ghiberti could ever have recommended to him to cultivate the goodwill of such a being, who appeared incapable of the smallest good disposition or benevolence towards others.

He fancied too, that the eyes of Federico were often fixed upon him with a most malignant expression, scowling from under his

his black eyebrows menaces of dark intent; and he felt relieved when the end of the repaſt freed them from the preſence of a man ſo hateful. It appeared ſtrange that any man ſhould have collected around him ſuch a numerous ſet of repulſive and terrible beings; yet Rezzonico ſeemed capable to command, and bow their ferocious tempers beneath his ſway. The reflection did not tend to make him better ſatisfied with his ſituation, but anxiety would not enable him to eſcape, and he ſtrove to call up all the fortitude he was maſter of, that he might face with proper courage whatever evils he was doomed to undergo.

The Monk, however, behaved as if he had nothing to fear; he even treated him with a fawning civility, which Sigiſmond felt inclined to diſtruſt, but that he could frame no reaſon which ſhould induce a man ſo to act who had him wholly in his power, and who had no need to uſe any deceit towards him.

Some days paſſed in this friendly commerce,

merce, and nothing arofe to give Sigifmond any difquiet. He took advantage of his free accefs to the library, and renewed his acquaintance with feveral favourite authors. He was apparently at large in the caftle, but he ftill felt that he was in reality a prifoner; for he viewed with a natural and infurmountable regret the tremendous foffe, the impenetrable walls, and the maffy gates of the edifice; nor was there one human being within the whole abode with whom his heart could hold the leaft communion. Neither Benedetto nor Federico were at all affailable beings; nor was Sigifmond poffeffed of the one prevailing key which finds its way to many a flinty heart, where compaffion and benevolence would fue in vain; he had no means to bribe either of the menials, even if he held it honourable to corrupt the domeftics in order to efcape from the mafter. If he could have felt fatisfied that Agnes was fafe, he would have endeavoured to have borne his own misfortunes; but the painful fenfe of her danger

 added

added ſtings to every perſonal miſery, and ſometimes threatened wholly to diſpoſſeſs him of that firmneſs he felt it ſo neceſſary to preſerve.

After a ſtay of a few days at the caſtle, Father Regolo announced to Sigiſmond his intended departure on the morrow, and that it was the will of Prince Rezzonico that he ſhould return to his former confinement; a command which Sigiſmond willingly enough obeyed, for it was even leſs irkſome to him than the company of the Monk, who reſtrained him from further proſecution of his ſearch into the deſerted and ſubterraneous apartments, in which his mind found ſuch intereſting occupation. On the morning of the following day, therefore, Sigiſmond was not ſurpriſed at having his food brought to him as uſual by Benedetto, who, though naturally loquacious, yet guardedly uncommunicative, was now uncommonly ſilent—a circumſtance which Sigiſmond could only aſcribe to his having been tutored to be ſilent. The loſs of his converſation was not much

much to be lamented; at once artful and garrulous, he frequently gave hints which he tried afterwards to explain away, and seemed always on the watch for every thing that Sigismond uttered. Restrained as he was now from his usual indulgence, his visit was short, and Sigismond determined to make another attempt at the subterraneous apartments, notwithstanding the danger which the increased fastenings on the door pointed out as attendant on such a search. Deeming it, therefore, probable that he should meet with no interruptions during the day, he took his lamp, and boldly advanced towards the door which had before barred his further progress: it was still firmly fastened, and as it was all over strongly plated with iron, it resisted the many attempts he made to separate the wood-work. Disappointed and fatigued, he remounted the stairs, when it occurred to him that as every story resembled the others in almost all particulars, there might be a similar passage from the deserted apartments immediately under his

room, and returning up the ſtairs, found his way to the ruined ſuite of rooms, which he determined firſt haſtily to examine in ſearch of a ſtaircaſe which might communicate with the ſubterraneous apartments. He advanced then along the large and ruinous rooms with a haſty and yet a faltering ſtep; he ſurveyed them by the feeble light of his lamp, and all appeared in the ſame ſtate as when he laſt viſited them: yet the remembrance of the ſtream of light which had iſſued from thoſe very windows, ruſhed upon his mind, and filled it with a kind of ſolemn awe. That light he was certain had not been merely imaginary, and yet there appeared no human means of accounting for it; nor could he imagine any reaſon why a ſupernatural light ſhould appear in that ſpot, for no purpoſe it ſhould ſeem, but to impreſs his ſoul with horror. Recollecting, therefore, all the arguments by which he had formerly endeavoured to fortify the mind of Agnes againſt all viſionary alarms and ſhadowy terrors, he proceeded through

every

every one of the rooms, and in the furthermoſt, though he found no apparent outlet, he at length diſcovered a trap-door in the flooring, which fitted ſo exactly, that it long eluded his ſearch; having, however, perceived it, he with ſome labour lifted it, and found that it led to a narrow and very ruinous ſtone ſtaircaſe;—he wiſhed to contrive ſome method of leaving the trap-door ſo ajar that he might be able to ſecure a retreat in caſe of any unforeſeen alarm; but reflecting that if he found another outlet, he only ſubjected himſelf to diſcovery, he abandoned this idea, and cloſing it after him, deſcended the ſtaircaſe. So noiſome a vapour met him as he advanced, that it nearly extinguiſhed the light; however, in the windings of the paſſage he thought he felt a freſher breeze, his lamp burnt more brightly, and he concluded that he was near ſome aperture that admitted the open air. Again he came into more cloſe and narrow ways, where ſometimes the roof was ſo low that he could ſcarcely ſtand upright,

 while

while the ſtrong, though ſmall doors on either hand proved that theſe were the dungeons of the caſtle—places which had haply been witneſſes to many ſcenes of diſtreſs and murder! He wondered in which of theſe dreadful cells the unfortunate Marquis di Mirandola had been confined; yet while he gave the ready ſigh his terrible fate too ſadly claimed, he remembered the bones he had ſeen on the other ſtaircaſe, and imagined that the Marquis, knowing too well whither they were going to drag him, had reſiſted their purpoſe, and had met on the ſpot with the puniſhment of ſuch reſiſtance.

While theſe gloomy reflections paſſed over his mind, a light croſſed the paſſage at ſome diſtance from the place where he ſtood. Immediate and perſonal danger now ſeemed to menace him. Who could be in thoſe dreadful vaults, and for what purpoſe? If, indeed, Prince Rezzonico, as appeared too probable, wiſhed his death, what an opportunity did his being in that place afford to any

any one who might chance to ſee him!—Who would ever diſcover his fate in thoſe appalling regions, where no human being could ever go, ſave for the purpoſes of murder?

While he thus pauſed, and for a moment doubted whether he had not better haſten back to the trap-door, the time for deliberation was over; he heard footſteps cloſe to him, and in an inſtant the light flaſhed very near him in the paſſage, from an outlet he had not yet reached. Sigiſmond, who, from the impulſe of the moment, extinguiſhed his own lamp, ſaw a man advance with cautious ſtep, and muffled up ſo as hardly to be diſtinguiſhed; yet the tall, bony figure reminded Sigiſmond of Federico;—he ſaw him apply a key to the door of a dungeon, which he unlocked, and entered; and Sigiſmond followed ſo cloſely as to perceive a human being in the depth of the cell beyond; he heard a moaning voice addreſs the jailer, who anſwered in a muttering, ſurly tone, but he could not diſtinguiſh the words of either.

 "Surely,"

"Surely," thought he, "this muſt be Bertoldo; Ghiberti hinted a ſuſpicion that Bertoldo was not really dead."

Impreſſed with this idea, he ventured ſo far into the cell that he could ſcarcely reach the door before the jailer turned to depart. In the deep obſcurity of thoſe vaults, the man could not diſtinguiſh the form of Sigiſmond; but he diſcerned that ſomething flitted along the darkneſs, and as guilt is ever cowardly, the idea of a ſupernatural being inſtantly croſſed his mind, and he felt a degree of icy tremor, which prevented his purſuing it. Sigiſmond, aware that his footſteps might be heard, or his figure perceived, trembled at the thought of being followed by this perſon, and caught, for there could be no doubt of the conſequence that would enſue; taken in thoſe vaults, inſtant death would be the certain puniſhment of his curioſity, and though he imagined it poſſible to elude purſuit in the total darkneſs that reigned there, yet he ſhuddered at the idea of being bewildered in thoſe ſubter-

raneous

raneous caverns, and becoming the victim of a lingering death by famine. Not far, therefore, did he fly from the door of the dungeon, lest he ſhould forget in his alarm the way which, when no longer agitated, he doubted not of finding. He lamented that he had extinguiſhed his light, though he believed it to have been a neceſſary ſtep; but he would rather have been able to ſee his way back to the trap-door, and through the ground floor apartments, and up the ſpiral ſtaircaſe, all which he had to paſs before he could review the light of day. While he yet lingered behind a prominence in the rugged walls of thoſe terrible caverns, he ſaw again the gleam of a lamp, and the ſame man appeared. Unable better to conceal himſelf, he remained where he was, and in a moment Federico ſtood before him.

"Comeſt thou here to torment me?" ſaid the man with a hollow voice; "begone, horrible ſpectre!"

Sigiſmond, aſtoniſhed at the manner of

 Federico,

Federico, uttered not a word, and tried in vain to comprehend him.

" I know thee!" exclaimed Federico; " thou art——Ha, Signor! is it you?" continued he in an altered voice, as he held the lamp up to Sigismond's face. " Bless my soul, how came you hither?"

" Who or what did you take me for, Federico?" said Sigismond.

" Oh Signor! no matter," replied Federico; " but how came you to escape from your chamber? I think you are a sort of prisoner there," added he, rather gruffly, " and I must lead you back to it, or, indeed, to some more secure abode."

With these words he attempted to seize Sigismond, who resisted the attack with so much strength, that Federico deposited the lamp on a crevice in the wall, and again assailed the youth, who, determined to keep the mode of his escape a secret from Federico, and conscious that if he were to be led back the usual way, the whole would be discovered, exerted his utmost force to baffle

baffle the aſſaulter, and after ſome minutes' ſevere ſtruggling, he threw Federico to the ground, and ſeizing the lamp, rapidly retraced his former ſteps, found the ſtair-caſe and trap-door, and happily reached the deſerted apartments without the leaſt alarm. He relaxed not in his ſpeed, however, but haſtily paſſing through them, mounted the ſtaircaſe which led to the apartments of the unfortunate Marquis, and, cloſing the entrance with all poſſible care, regained his own chamber, and ſo completely covered the door which led into the other rooms, with his bed, that he truſted the mode of his eſcape would remain undiſcovered;—yet he trembled for the conſequences of this meeting, as he doubted not but he ſhould be more cloſely confined, and perhaps ſhut out wholly from any poſſibility of further exploring the myſteries of thoſe ſubterraneous caverns. It was now evident that there was at leaſt one priſoner detained there; and while he dwelt on the idea that it muſt be that Father Bertoldo, from whom

Zadeſki had taught him to expect much information, he ſometimes imagined that it might be that parent of whoſe death he had been ſo unfeelingly informed, and who was ſaid to have been buried almoſt immediately previous to his arrival at the caſtle, buried indeed in thoſe dreadful vaults! And for what more horrible end he might be reſerved, the ſickening fancy of Sigiſmond ſhuddered to imagine.

In ſuggeſtions like theſe the hours elapſed, and Benedetto appeared as uſual, with light and food. Not a word was ſaid of Sigiſmond's excurſion, and he could not imagine the cauſe of this forbearance; yet, anxious as he was to purſue the diſcovery he had made, to find the dungeon, and converſe with the priſoner ſo carefully ſerved by Federico, he dared not venture out that night, thinking it not impoſſible but that Federico might expect him to return, and lie in wait for him among the windings of thoſe very paſſages through which he had eſcaped. In fact, Federico, who, when deprived of the light, loſt

loſt immediately ſight of Sigiſmond, without being able to trace his ſteps, ſtunned as he was by the fall he had received, continued for ſome time on the ſame ſpot where the rencounter had taken place; and when he recovered, vainly hoped that Sigiſmond would return by the ſame route, ſince he knew of no other. Having waited ſome time, he endeavoured at length to retrace the way by which he had come; but bruiſed, alarmed, and without light, he became bewildered in the mazes of the caverns, and wandered about a conſiderable time without regaining the outlet by which he had entered. Oppreſſed by the ſame fears which had appalled him on the firſt view of Sigiſmond, the obſcurity of the place received a thouſand new terrors from his wild imagination; and he would ſometimes have been tempted to believe that the figure he had ſeen, had really been the ghoſt of the laſt Marquis di Mirandola, but that the loſs of his lamp, and the bruiſes he had received, convinced

convinced him too powerfully of the materiality of the appearance he had witneſſed.

After a long time wretchedly ſpent in thoſe noiſome regions, Federico at length regained the upper air, and found his ſpirits ſo much revived by daylight, and his welcome eſcape, that he recollected what a charge he had received from Prince Rezzonico reſpecting the priſoner entruſted to his care, and at length ſummoned up fortitude enough to determine to bury this adventure in his own boſom. He knew, that were he to mention it to Benedetto, the garrulity of the old man would riſk revealing the ſecret of the exiſtence of ſuch a priſoner; and he knew that the diſcloſure of that ſecret would coſt him his life. He was well convinced that Rezzonico was not a man to overlook or pardon a breach of obedience in ſuch a point as this; and fearful as he felt of returning into thoſe caverns alone, where he had paſſed ſo many hours not much to his ſatisfaction, he dared not take any one with him, even though he could

could enſure their remaining at a diſtance from the dungeon, and thus prevent the poſſibility of their diſcovering what his buſineſs there was, ſince it was to remain wholly unknown that he had any buſineſs there at all. Obliged by all theſe reflections to gain fortitude enough to continue his viſits to the dungeon as uſual, and unable to imagine any colouring under which he could relate any part of the adventure to Benedetto, without raiſing thoſe ſuſpicions he wiſhed to avoid, he reſolved to be wholly ſilent on the ſubject; yet, when he recollected that part of his ſecret, he knew not how much, was certainly diſcovered by Sigiſmond, and that ſince he was ignorant of the route by which the youth had gained thoſe caverns, he might be again ſurpriſed there by him, and the whole of the myſtery be revealed;—he therefore reſolved to viſit him in his apartment, and by ſome means or other ſecure his ſilence.

Federico was not a man to be ſcrupulous about the means; his own life was at ſtake, and

and if Sigiſmond refuſed to give him an unequivocal promiſe of ſecrecy, he felt he could purſue any method to enſure it. When, therefore, he returned to the upper regions, he was vexed to find that Benedetto had paid his uſual viſit, and knew not by what means to obtain the keys from his fellow-ſervant, without exciting ſuſpicions he was unwilling to kindle; yet ſo reluctant was he to ſuffer another day to paſs without taking ſome effectual method to free himſelf from the fears Sigiſmond now inſpired him with, that he determined to endeavour to obtain the keys by ſtealth. This, with ſome caution and dexterity, he accompliſhed; and Benedetto, unſuſpecting any thing, retired for the night.

Sigiſmond meanwhile, finding hour after hour elapſe without hearing any thing of his late adventure, began to fear that its conſequences had, perhaps, been fatal to Federico; and further apprehenſions even than that took poſſeſſion of his mind;—he thought it was terrible to leave a human being, even

ſuch

ſuch as he feared Federico to be, to periſh for want of aſſiſtance in caverns ſo horrible as thoſe where they had met; but then he remembered the unhappy priſoner, encloſed in a loathſome dungeon, his fate probably known only to Federico, who might now be horribly prevented from carrying him the uſual ſuſtenance. The idea of robbing this wretched being of the ſmall, the melancholy comfort of daily beholding his jailer, of ſuffering him to die for want of food in that dreadful abode, wholly overcame the heart of Sigiſmond, and he reſolved to reviſit the ſubterraneous apartments, to ſeek for the body of Federico; if he found him yet alive, to procure him ſome aſſiſtance, and to obtain from him the keys, and a full confeſſion reſpecting his priſoner. His heart beat high at the thought of the humane expedition he was going to undertake, and he wholly forgot its danger in its benevolence; he knew that the few inhabitants of the caſtle uſually retired to reſt by a certain hour, and he reſolved, when the

great

great clock ſhould ſtrike one, by which time he judged they would all be buried in ſleep, to ſet forth on this achievement.

Midnight was already long paſt; the clock had chimed the third quarter, and Sigiſmond, elated with an indefinable hope of diſcovering his loſt parent, began to prepare for his departure. Suddenly it occurred to him, that although he had thrown down Federico, he had given him no blow likely to occaſion his death; and as he had eluded his purſuit, it was poſſible Federico, recovered from the blow, might lie in ambuſh in thoſe vaults to ſurpriſe him, if he ſhould dare to return. Struck with this thought, and reflecting that though his purpoſe was laudable, it was right to be guarded againſt danger, he determined to uſe ſome of the arms of the late Marquis di Mirandola; and having diſplaced the hangings of his bed, and opened the way into the deſerted rooms, he accoutred himſelf in the helmet, the breaſt-plate, cuiraſs, and ſhield, which had formed his trophy, and graſping the ſabre

in

in one hand, and carrying the lamp in the other, he advanced through the deſerted rooms. As he ſtepped onward, he viewed his own figure in one of the duſky mirrors that yet ſpoke of former magnificence; he ſtopped a moment to gaze at himſelf, and while he ſtopped, he diſtinctly heard the door of the corridor unlock, and grate upon its hinges. Alarmed at a ſound ſo unuſual at ſuch an hour, it immediately occurred to Sigiſmond that ruffians were coming to murder him, and he rejoiced that he was ſo well armed againſt the danger. To common aſſaults he believed himſelf now equal; and as his enemies would not ſuſpect how well he was prepared, it was not probable they would come in large numbers to ſurpriſe one ſleeping foe. He liſtened, and could only diſtinguiſh one footſtep advancing along the gallery; he heard the door of his chamber uncloſed, and as he ſtood immediately oppoſite to the aperture, in the centre of the ſuite of deſerted apartments, he could eaſily diſcern that Federico entered alone. He

ſaw

ſaw him betray aſtoniſhment and terror as he gazed around the vacant cell, and perceived unequivocal ſigns of ſomething even more than terror, as he obſerved the portrait of Mirandola. Sigiſmond now ſlowly advanced from the interior room, and Federico gazing for a moment on the martial figure and menacing air of the being who was approaching him, ſtaid not to examine whether it were human or ſupernatural, but haſtily recloſing the door of the chamber, paſſed rapidly along the corridor; and faſtening the outer door, relieved Sigiſmond from his alarm. From the principal part of it the ſight of Federico had at once lightened his boſom; he had not now to fear the having deprived a fellow-creature of life, nor had he to dread the lingering death of the priſoner in conſequence of the murder of his jailer; yet deeming it not impoſſible but that Federico might recover from alarms which appeared to him ſo very abſurd, ſince he could plainly diſcover that he had ſuppoſed him a being more than mortal, and

return

return to prove the truth or falſehood of what he imagined he had ſeen, Sigiſmond weighed in his own mind what plan it would be beſt to purſue in caſe of another viſit from Federico. He determined to be prepared to reſiſt danger, whatever form it wore; and taking the ſabre alone, replaced the reſt of the armour in its uſual form, cloſed the aperture into the deſerted rooms, and concealed it as uſual by his bed, and then, reſolute to watch for the return of Federico, he threw himſelf upon his couch, and ruminated on the events that had occurred.

In Federico ſo many marks of actual guilt appeared, that he could hardly heſitate to pronounce him a murderer; the promptneſs with which he had exclaimed, on their firſt meeting in the caverns, that he knew him—the horrible ſuggeſtions that had chaſed all hues of health from his cheek, and forced from him an exclamation, which, though myſterious, expreſſed but too much—the change in his voice, countenance, and

manner

manner when he recognized Sigismond—and the dreadful nature of the business which certainly carried him into those horrible caverns, all concurred to point him out as a man capable, and perhaps guilty of murder. That this man had means of access to his chamber, was not a welcome suggestion. The terrible alarm he had this night betrayed, though it confirmed all former suspicions, might at another period be wholly conquered; and no vigilance could elude, no prudence baffle, nor no courage defeat designs which would be so craftily suggested, and followed with such wily malignity. These reflections employed him till morning, towards which he at length fell into a slumber.

Several days, however, passed on without any circumstance occurring to renew his alarms: he was visited as usual by Benedetto, and not a word was ever said of the midnight visit and horrid alarm of Federico, who, in fact, when he reached his own chamber, felt so much in doubt of the truth of what

what he had ſeen, that knowing the extreme anger ſuch tales ever excited in Prince Rezzonico, he dared not relate what he had no means of atteſting, though he felt too much alarmed to venture again to viſit Sigiſmond.

The quiet ſecurity in which ſome days had now elapſed, had reſtored to the youth his accuſtomed tranquillity, and he began to form new ſchemes of exploring the vaults. As he was one evening wandering through the apartments, his eye was again caught by a ſtream of light, waving over the high graſs in the courts below. After a while it diſappeared; and while Sigiſmond ſtill ſtood gazing, he ſaw ſuddenly a light appear, as if in the ground, in the centre of the court: he marked the ſpot attentively, and, ſtruck with a circumſtance ſo ſingular, formed a thouſand conjectures as to the cauſe of ſuch an appearance. After ſome time the light wholly vaniſhed, and Sigiſmond continued to gaze long after the object of his reverie was withdrawn. His ear was at length

caught by a low moaning ſound, which he remembered to have heard before on the night he had witneſſed the former light. The myſterious priſoner whom Federico had viſited, now occurred to his mind, and he doubted not but that the light had ſtreamed from Federico's lamp, and had been ſeen through the grate placed at the top of the dungeon to admit air. If this were the caſe then, the unhappy being confined in that horrible receſs, was not only deprived of ſociety and liberty, but was even denied the comfort of a light. He remembered that as he had followed the windings of thoſe caverns, he had felt in places the freſh breath of heaven blowing upon him, and he determined once more to ſeek the trap-door, and to endeavour to find the dungeon which Federico had entered that eventful day. As the viſit was now over, he concluded he could not fix on a more favourable opportunity; and though he ſhould be unable to afford the priſoner any other comfort than that of knowing that there exiſted a human being

being who commiſerated his ſituation, yet even that he felt was a conſolation not wholly to be deſpiſed. The idea too that, perhaps, he was going to afford this relief to the boſom of a father, quickened his activity; and, haſtily croſſing the lower apartments, he lifted the trap-door, and deſcending the ruinous ſtairs, paſſed thoſe ſpots engraven on his memory by many a fearful recollection. At laſt he came to the doors of the dungeons, ſo exactly ſimilar to each other, that he ſcarcely knew how to diſtinguiſh that which Federico had ſo myſteriouſly viſited. At length he liſtened at the door of one which he believed to be that which he ſought; and hearing the low moaning which had caught his ear in the upper rooms, he was convinced he was right. At times this heart-rending expreſſion of woe ſwelled into a deep, long groan, which came with double energy to the filial feelings of Sigiſmond. At length there was an interval of ſilence; he knocked at the maſſy door, and was anſwered by a voice which he

knew to be the ſame that had ſpoken to Federico; it only ſaid—"Who is there?"

Sigiſmond, half afraid to truſt his voice, ſaid merely—"A friend!"

The priſoner uttered ſome other words which he could ill diſtinguiſh, and Sigiſmond again ſaid—"Come nearer."

That he was underſtood, he was convinced by the clanking of irons, which approached the door; and the wretched priſoner ſaid—"Who is a friend to the miſerable Bertoldo?"

"Bertoldo!" exclaimed Sigiſmond; "alas! it is one whom Bertoldo knows not, but who pities his ſituation.—Are there any means by which I could ſpeak to you more eaſily?"

"If you could reach the grating in the inner court," replied Bertoldo, "you would not be obſerved from the caſtle, and we could converſe more freely."

"I will endeavour to find it," ſaid Sigiſmond, "but I am myſelf a priſoner."

"Alas!"

"Alas!" ſaid Bertoldo, "and who are you?"

"It is impoſſible now to explain myſelf," replied the youth, "I fear leſt Federico ſhould return."

"You need not fear," anſwered Bertoldo; "his viſits are but once in three or four nights; and, truſting to the ſecurity of my dungeon, no human being ever viſits theſe caverns in the interval.—Tell me then who you are, and why you are alſo a priſoner?"

"Alas! Father," replied Sigiſmond, "I cannot anſwer your queſtions, for I neither know who I am, nor why I am confined! My name is Sigiſmond, but more I know not."

"Are you young?" aſked Bertoldo.

"I am not yet twenty," replied the youth.

"Alas, poor youth!" ſaid Bertoldo; "would I could ſee thee! but I know not whether I could diſtinguiſh thy lineaments, for ſo long have I been excluded from the light

light of day, that when Federico brings me my food, his lamp almoſt blinds me. The grating at the top of my dungeon, though it admits ſome air, is ſo overgrown by long graſs, that it ſcarcely enables me to diſtinguiſh between day and night."

"Alas! Father," replied Sigiſmond, "what a melancholy ſituation!—How long have you been here?"

"I have no means of keeping an account of the lapſe of time," replied Bertoldo; "but I believe my confinement has already laſted months; nor can I imagine a poſſible chance of relief: the anger, the hatred of the Prince are inappeaſable."

"Alas! my good Father," ſaid the youth, "how truly I pity you!—When can I beſt try to viſit the grate, for through this thick door I hear ſo imperfectly?"

"You will be unobſerved at any time," replied Bertoldo; "for the only apartments which overlook this court, have long been ſhut up."

"In

" In the laſt of that range of rooms," anſwered Sigiſmond, " I am confined."

" Ha!" ſaid Bertoldo, " in the vaulted room at the end of the eaſt gallery?"

" The ſame," replied Sigiſmond.

" And are you quiet there?" aſked the Father. " Many ſtrange tales have been reported of that apartment."

" True," replied the youth; " but my repoſe is undiſturbed by any ſupernatural viſiters."

" And how," enquired Bertoldo, " did you reach theſe vaults?"

" Through a trap-door in the laſt of the lower apartments," anſwered Sigiſmond.

" My ſon, you are courageous," obſerved the Father; " you muſt have encountered many difficulties, and ſurmounted many natural alarms, before you could have diſcovered this abode of miſery."

" Circumſtances, good Father, which would require too much explanation, firſt led me to ſuppoſe that ſome unfortunate perſon was, in fact, a priſoner here; often

before that time had the voice of your mourning reached my ears;---often had I distinguished your groans, but not knowing to what cause to attribute them, I had classed them among the mysteries that hang over this part of the castle; but when I found that there was really some one confined in these dungeons, I easily conquered every superstitious alarm, in the hope of relieving the bosom of misery with the voice of sympathy."

"Ten thousand thanks, generous youth," said Bertoldo, "for your humane and noble exertions! The prayers of the wretched shall still be your's."

"But, alas! Father," added Sigismond, "longer now I dare not stay; morning approaches, and Benedetto always visits my cell early."

"Is the Prince now at the castle?" asked Father Bertoldo.

"No," Sigismond replied, "he is at Venice, and his return is uncertain."

"One question more, dear youth, and I will

will detain you no longer," ſaid Bertoldo.—"When I firſt mentioned my name to you, it ſeemed as though it were not wholly unknown to you—where or what had you heard of me?"

At the Convent of Franciſcans, in the woods near Colano," replied Sigiſmond, "as I was on my way hither; I was adviſed by Father Zadeſki to ſeek the friendſhip of Father Bertoldo.

"Alas! my young friend," ſaid Bertoldo, "what a train of remembrances have you awakened in my boſom!—Zadeſki! Colano!—Ah! who then are you?"

"Would I knew!" replied Sigiſmond; "but, alas! Father, I muſt leave you; the caſtle clock ſummons me away—ſcarcely ſhall I reach my room ere Benedetto will arrive."

"Farewel, dear generous youth!" exclaimed the Father; "take with you the prayers, the beſt wiſhes of Bertoldo!—When will you viſit me again?"

"Soon, I hope, my good Father," replied Sigiſmond; "I ſhall be impatient for

for a renewal of this conference.—And now farewel!"

Sigismond hastily retraced his former steps, and fortunately regained his apartment, replaced the hangings, and prevented all discovery before the arrival of Benedetto.

---

## CHAP. IV.

"From hints long treasured up, from broken phrases."

WALPOLE.

THE day following that on which Sigismond left Colano, Father Buonafede repaired to the Convent where Agnes dwelt, to impart to her the sad tidings of her lover's departure. He found her with a smile of returning gaiety on her face, and he shuddered as he saw her anxiously watch for

his companion. Unable to tell her the uncertain deſtiny of the youth, the good man gazed on her lovely countenance, and pity beamed from his eye. Agnes ſaw the ſtruggles of his ſoul, and eagerly enquired what dreadful tidings he had to impart:—the idea of Sigiſmond's death inſtantly occurred to her, and ſhe was nearly deprived of ſenſe and motion before the good Father could explain to her the cauſe and manner of his departure. Though leſs afflictive than his death, yet the ready mind of Agnes imagined ſo much difficulty and ſuffering in his preſent lot, that ſhe remained overwhelmed with ſorrow; and it was with difficulty that Buonafede could rouſe her to any exertion of calmneſs and fortitude. She ſunk into a languor which nothing could diſperſe; and the agitation of her mind, but ill recovered from the loſs of her mother, and only kept from ſinking under that diſtreſs by the conſciouſneſs of Sigiſmond's love, and his continual attention, now threw her into a ſlow and waſting fever, which

enervated her frame, and made the moſt terrible conſequences apprehended.

During this interval Agnes kept herſelf very much in her own chamber, and received no viſits from any of the Nuns, ſave a young and beautiful Novice, named Laurana, who had ever diſtinguiſhed her with very peculiar affection, and who had obtained an equal return of it from the ſuſceptible heart of Agnes. This young friend ſometimes came to her overwhelmed with ſorrow, which Agnes thought ſhe could diſcover was on her account, though its immediate cauſe ſhe ſought in vain to penetrate. When ſhe made any enquiries relative to it, Laurana would only throw herſelf into her arms, and ſometimes weep, and ſometimes ſmile, but utterly diſclaim any cauſe of conſequence for the agitation ſhe could not conceal. One day, however, her increaſed uneaſineſs really alarmed Agnes, who beſought her with ſo much earneſtneſs to reveal what it was that preyed on her mind, that ſhe at length promiſed at her next viſit to explain

herſelf,

herſelf, adding—" But, deareſt Agnes, I can explain only my own ſuſpicions; will you allow me to bring to you one who can tell you more?"

Agnes enquired her meaning, and ſhe replied—" Do you not know Siſter Felicia? You cannot have overlooked her, little as you have mingled with our community."

" Surely," ſaid Agnes, " you mean a Nun who uſually prays apart from the reſt, and whoſe ſweet voice has often penetrated my ſoul when it has riſen alone and diſtinct in thoſe ſolemn breathing airs that raviſh and elevate the mind. She is tall and delicate, and her countenance expreſſes a mind with which mine has long languiſhed to hold converſe."

" The ſame," replied Laurana; " this Nun, my ſiſter, has beſought me to introduce her to you, and ſeems to know circumſtances of high import to your peace;—will you conſent?"

" With gratitude," replied Agnes; " and as I ſhall not leave my chamber, it is wholly

wholly immaterial to me at what time you come; but remember, my Laurana, I ſhall be impatient until this myſtery is cleared up."

"Alas! my ſiſter," ſaid the kind-hearted Laurana, "may its explanation enable you to avoid all miſchief! Much, I fear, hangs over you!"

"Yet from whence?" ſighed Agnes. "Alone in the world, ſurely I have neither enemies nor friends.—One friend I had, but he is torn from me, and now I am, indeed, a ſolitary being!"

"Deſpair not, my ſiſter," ſaid Laurana; "though you have enemies unknown to yourſelf, yet you have one powerful friend, who never forſakes the innocent, and who will aſſiſt you to defeat all their machinations."

The gentle girl here took her leave, and Agnes remained for ſome time muſing ſadly on the melancholy hints ſhe had received of ſome unknown woe preparing for her. There was now, ſhe thought, but one avenue through which misfortune could reach

her

her—events that involved Sigiſmond alone could afflict her;—for herſelf, an unconnected, ſolitary individual, ſhe thought ſhe had nothing to fear, but for Sigiſmond ſhe had long been alarmed. The ſhort letter which had reached Father Buonafede, was not ſufficiently inſpiriting to be communicated to Agnes, and ſince that time he had been unable to convey to Colano any intelligence of himſelf; and uncertain of his fate, unhappy in his abſence, and comfortleſs in herſelf, Agnes looked back with regret, and forward with apprehenſion.

In vain, indeed, did ſhe endeavour to penetrate the thick veil that overhung the future; in vain did ſhe ſtrive to fix on ſome period, when ſhe might hope again to ſee the object of her tenderneſs, and to realize ſome of thoſe bright viſions of felicity which had been ſo cruelly interrupted. Not one reſting-place could her imagination find to fix itſelf to; totally ignorant of the purpoſe and end of Sigiſmond's abſence, her mind was in that ſtate of agonizing ſuſpenſe,

to

to which nothing is capable of affording relief, because nothing affords any gleam of certainty.

As a remedy to reflections so alarming as those which the remembrance of Sigismond, and the hints of Laurana excited, Agnes flew to the melancholy employment of looking over some letters and papers which her deceased mother had left in a casket. The writings were all in the hand-writing of Madame St. Clair, and all of a mournful tenor; yet they were mysterious to Agnes, who remembered no grief during the existence of her mother, nor any thing more distressing than the solitariness of their residence in the Villa Salviati, which she had never found oppressive, and of which Madame St. Clair had always declared her preference. What then had been this concealed sorrow which had preyed on the spirits, and embittered, if not shortened, the life of that lost parent? To what inexplicable misery did she refer in lines which tore the sensible heart of her daughter? To what

cruel

cruel treatment could ſhe allude? and whoſe guilt and inſenſibility had rendered her life a burthen, which ſhe would not ſo long have ſupported but for the ſake of the innocent child of her boſom?

Expreſſions like theſe lacerated every feeling of Agnes; and ſhe was weeping bitterly over the papers, when a gentle tap at the door announced the arrival of Laurana and Felicia.

Felicia advanced, led by Laurana, who inſtantly retired, almoſt without diſturbing Agnes from her melancholy employment. She roſe, however, ſtill in tears, and apologizing for her ſorrow, pointed to the papers ſhe had been examining as its immediate cauſe. Her action drew the eyes of Felicia to the papers; and taking up one, ſhe gazed at it for a moment, preſſed it to her boſom, and tears alſo filled her compaſſionate eyes. Agnes thanked her for her ſympathy, and Felicia, embracing her, ſaid in a voice of affection—"That ſympathy, dear Agnes, which I have felt for you ſince the firſt moment

moment I ſaw you, is not the vague affectation of ſentiment; your countenance, ſo nearly reſembling that of a moſt beloved friend, firſt attracted my attention; and theſe papers, in a hand-writing moſt familiar to my eyes, aſſure me the reſemblance has not its ſole foundation in my fancy."

"Theſe papers," ſaid Agnes, "were the writing of my mother."

"Yes, I doubted it not," replied Felicia; "your air, your features, the ſound of your voice, all aſſure me that you were, indeed, the child of my beſt loved ſiſter, whoſe name you bear."

"Your ſiſter!" cried Agnes; "do I ſee before me the ſiſter of my mother?"

"Alas! my child," replied Felicia, "you ſee, indeed, her ſiſter; but you ſee her, I fear, powerleſs to ſerve you, though conſcious that you require the active exertions of friendſhip;—you have enemies, my Agnes—enemies whom you ſuſpect not, and againſt whom I fear I cannot ſecure you.—

Tell

Tell me, my new-found darling, what were the name and condition of your father?"

Agnes, gazing in wonder at the Nun, who, professing so near a connexion with her mother, could be ignorant of such a circumstance, remained a moment without speaking; the surprise she felt painted itself on her ingenuous countenance, and the Sister perceived it. She repeated her question, adding—"I will hereafter tell you my reason for so strange an enquiry."

"Agnes, who could not for a moment retain a suspicion of a being so noble, so ingenuous, so prepossessing as Felicia, replied at length—"My father was a French Officer, and his name was St. Clair."

"Did you ever see him?" demanded Felicia.

"Alas! no," answered Agnes; "surely you must have known that he died either before, or immediately after my birth; and that in consequence of his death, my mother quitted France, and resided in the Villa Salviati, near Colano."

The

The Nun ſtarted;—" Near Colano!" repeated ſhe; " did my ſiſter live ſo near me?"

" For ſeventeen years," replied the weeping Agnes, whoſe tears flowed afreſh at this remembrance of her mother.

" Near then the Caſtle Pontalti?" reſumed the Nun.

" Salviati was built with the materials of the ruined Pontalti," replied Agnes.

" Alas!" ſaid the Nun, " Pontalti deſtroyed! Wherefore, my child, was it deſtroyed?"

" Many tales are told about it," replied Agnes, " but I believe them unworthy of credit; all I know is, that my mother told me, when Pontalti fell into the hands of its preſent poſſeſſor, he pulled down the caſtle, and built with its materials the villa we inhabited."

" And who, my Agnes," aſked Felicia, " who placed your mother and yourſelf in the villa?—Was it its owner?"

" I believe

" I believe not," replied the weeping girl, " but I cannot exactly tell."

" You know, however, the name of its owner?"

" An Italian Prince, but I do not exactly recollect his name."

" Was it Rezzonico?" said Felicia.

" It was," said Agnes.

" And, dear Agnes, pardon my enquiries," resumed the Nun, " but tell me, did your mother ever see this Prince?"

" Never," replied Agnes.

" Alas!" said Felicia, " and Pontalti then is levelled with the ground!—Dear, beloved scenes! Are no traces remaining of it?"

" Yes," said Agnes; " the chapel is still standing, though in ruins, and a long corridor leading to it."

" And that chapel," sighed Felicia—" how many recollections does it bring to my mind! And the former possessor of Pontalti, my Agnes, who was that?"

Agnes again felt astonished at the manner

of

of Felicia, whose melancholy remarks implied such intimate acquaintance, and whose enquiries betrayed such total ignorance of the circumstances and places thus recalled to her memory: she answered, however—"The Marquis di Mirandola."

"Which Marquis?" reiterated Felicia.

"He who lost his life by the attack of robbers," replied Agnes.

"Alas! Mirandola, thy name then is perished from the earth, and no memorial survives of thee!" exclaimed the Nun, rising from her chair, and clasping her hands in agony. "Dear, innocent, unconscious victim," said she, in a solemn tone, gazing earnestly on Agnes, "ignorant of thy fate, of thy connexions, how my heart bleeds for thee! I meant to have told thee all, but now I cannot.—Agnes!—Mirandola!—I must go; some other time I may be more composed."

She walked up and down the narrow cell with a disturbed and unequal step; and Agnes, seeing hysterical convulsions strug-

gling

gling in her throat, offered her water, which, after a while, ſhe ſwallowed, and becoming more compoſed, embraced Agnes, and a copious flood of tears guſhed from her eyes; and Agnes hoped ſhe would now be able to unravel a myſtery which ſeemed to oppreſs her heart ſo deeply, but ſhe again moved to depart, ſaying, with a mild and benevolent air—"My child, pardon me the uneaſineſs I have occaſioned you; I have left your feelings in a cruel agitation, which the violence of my own will not now allow me to alleviate. It ſhall not be long ere I fully explain to you all that has appeared myſterious; but now I muſt again embrace you, and depart."

Agnes ſaw the Nun depart with a ſorrow bordering on deſpair; ſo many affecting ideas had been recalled to her mind by the converſation that had already paſſed, ſo many ſurmiſes had been ſuggeſted, ſo many apprehenſions raiſed, that ſhe ſat down on her miſerable mattreſs, and wept, conſcious only of a ſenſe of agony.

From

From this terrible ſtate ſhe was, however, rouſed by the entrance of the affectionate Laurana, who having learned that Siſter Felicia had quitted her in much agitation of ſpirits, came to ſee what conſolation ſhe could afford to her beloved Agnes. Frequently did the gentle girl embrace her, preſs her hands, and in a ſoothing voice beſeech her to be calm, ere ſhe gained her attention; but it was not in the power even of miſery to deprive Agnes long of her ſenſe of gratitude and tenderneſs: ſhe returned the careſſes of Laurana, and found relief in weeping in her boſom. At length the young novice ſaid,—" Surely Siſter Felicia has communicated to you ſome very diſtreſſing intelligence?"

" Alas!" replied Agnes, " ſhe has told me nothing, but ſhe has awakened every cruel remembrance in my heart; ſhe has tortured me with fears and preſages to which I was before a ſtranger, and which now aſſume no determinate form. I tremble

I know

I know not why; for all I have learned is, that I have reason to be alarmed."

"But how could it happen," replied the compassionate Laurana, "that Sister Felicia, who is so good, so considerate, could thus harass your mind without attempting to relieve you?"

"My own feelings," answered Agnes, "have rendered me unjust to her: she suffers as much from recollection as I do from apprehension: she was so cruelly overpowered by her own agitation, as to render her just then incapable of attending to mine, but she has promised soon to visit me again, and clear up the mysterious cloud which she alone can penetrate.—Of what she has already said," continued Agnes, "I am wholly incapable of judging; I know not whether I am to believe circumstances of which, until now, I have never entertained a doubt.—In short, I await her next coming with an impatience which will scarcely allow me to be reasonable."

"Come with me now, dear sister," said the

the tender Laurana, " to the veſper ſervice; the ſolemn ſtrains of the muſic, the affecting fervour of the devotion, will ſooth and harmonize your heart: it is an exertion to come, but its conſequences will repay you."

Agnes determined to make the exertion in gratitude to her young friend, and leaning on her arm, attended her to the chapel, which ſhe entered juſt as the firſt peal began to ſwell from the organ, attended by a full chorus of ſoft and harmonious voices. The ſingle note, thrice at intervals repeated, ſwelled along the vaulted roof, and died away in the moſt delicate ſoftneſs; then poured a ſtrain of harmony ſo rich, ſo full, ſo ſoothing, that the heart of Agnes, ever alive to impreſſive muſic, could not but own its power in calming emotion. Tears of agony no longer flowed from her eyes; ſhe raiſed them to heaven with a look of reſignation ſo meek and humble, that Siſter Felicia, who had witneſſed her entrance, and obſerved the triumph obtained over her very evident perturbation, was ſo much affected

affected by it, that ſhe nearly fainted. She ſoon, however, recovered, and the ſervice received no interruption. Felicia knelt, as uſual, apart from the reſt of the Nuns; and in part of the ſervice her voice, uncommonly melodious, was heard alone. At firſt it ſounded tremulous and faint, but overcoming all agitation, it became ſo full and celeſtial, that the voice of an angel could ſcarcely have inſpired ſtronger feelings of devotion.

The ſervice at length over, Agnes retired to her cell, ſoothed, if not comforted—elevated, if not informed; and determined not to renew again thoſe recollections that had ſo agonized her;—ſhe ſought to loſe their impreſſion in a few hours of tranquil ſleep. This ſhe enjoyed without diſturbance, but the morning brought with it freſh cares.

Felicia was confined to her cell by ſickneſs, and ſent by Laurana her ſincere regrets to Agnes for being prevented from again viſiting her ſo ſoon; adding, that the preſent

 ſtate

ſtate of her health, which was diſordered merely from the agitation of her mind, would not allow her to requeſt the preſence of Agnes in her cell: quietneſs, perfect tranquillity, were neceſſary to enable her to regain ſufficient ſtrength to reſume her daily occupations.

"And, alas!" ſaid Laurana, weeping, as ſhe deſcribed the ſituation of Felicia, "ſhe has long been falling a victim to the repeated attacks of a diſeaſe her delicate frame is unequal to cope with; this will help her a little further on a journey of which ſhe has often wiſhed to reach the end."

Agnes wept at this account of ſo near and ſo intereſting a relation, ſo lately diſcovered. She communicated to Laurana the connexion that exiſted between them, and aſked by what family name the Nun had been known in the Convent.

"Family names," replied Laurana, "are always loſt in this community; and Siſter Felicia has been ſo long a member of it, that only

only a few of the elder Nuns could poſſibly remember it; but I always underſtood ſhe was of a great family, and highly connected."

"Did you ever hear," aſked Agnes, "how ſhe came to enter a Convent?"

"I have always underſtood," replied Laurana, "that it was her own peculiar choice."

"That is ſingular," ſaid Agnes.

"Not ſingular," ſaid the young Novice, "for there are many here the victims of voluntary devotion."

"And you, my Laurana," enquired Agnes, "may I aſk why you are here?"

"Me, my friend?" ſaid Laurana; "my hiſtory has nothing in it to excite any intereſt; I am here merely becauſe the world promiſed me nothing that allured me ſo much as the peaceful tranquillity of a cloiſter. I had a ſiſter, to whom the very name of ſecluſion was odious, and it was neceſſary that one of us ſhould be immured, to enable the other to live with comfort; I had

I had no lover that had touched my heart—my ſiſter had. Could I then heſitate?—I was incapable of it; and when, even after I had reſolved to enter a Convent, the old Count of Maſſoleni offered to reſcue me from a fate he was pleaſed to call unworthy of me, I ſaw nothing ſufficiently inviting in the lures of ambition and vanity, to tempt me to quit my humble choice, and throw myſelf into the arms of the Count. My reſolution has hitherto coſt me no regret, and I truſt it never will. The mode of life purſued here does not weary me; my ſpirits are good, and I have ſome amiable friends among the Nuns, whom I ſhould now be ſorry to leave."

"Ah, dear Laurana," replied Agnes, "how enviable is your ſituation! But there are, ſurely, many individuals in this, as in all other Convents, who hourly lament their ſecluſion, and ſigh for that world they have for ever renounced?"

"Too ſurely there are many of that deſcription," ſaid Laurana; "but thoſe

who

who enter theſe places with hearts attached either to the enjoyments of the world, or to any particular object in it, never can expect to attain the peace and tranquillity which ought to be the portion of religious ſecluſion. Thoſe too, who ſuffer petty paſſions to agitate their minds after they are here, as there are many who are the victims of pride, ambition, envy, and jealouſy, are miſerable here, as they would have been in the world. There are ſome, indeed, whoſe hiſtories would make your heart ache; ſacrificed to family pride, to avarice, to cruelty, while their gentle boſoms were agonized with the idea of perpetual ſecluſion. In vain do the Nuns attempt to dazzle the minds of the unthinking Novice with the acceptable ſacrifice ſhe is about to offer to religion; in vain do they blind her, by their deluſive words, to the various bad paſſions which rage in theſe little communities with as much violence as in the great world. A long and melancholy life ſerves only to convince the involuntary victim of perſecution

 and

and perſuaſion of the futility of all they have urged, and of the folly of ſuppoſing that ſacrifice can be acceptable, againſt which every feeling of the heart revolts."

"You have thought of theſe matters very deeply for your age, my Laurana," obſerved Agnes; "and though you ſee ſo clearly the miſery that is the lot of ſo many in Convents, does not your heart recoil againſt a life irrevocably devoted to one?"

"Not in the leaſt," replied Laurana; "the obſervations I have made, do not affect myſelf; if they did, I would, at the end of my noviciate, withdraw myſelf from hence; but I know I regret nothing I have left behind me. I have ſecured my ſiſter's happineſs; ſhe is married to the man of her choice, and in all her letters paints her felicity to me in the moſt glowing colours, and moſt fervently invites me to ſhare it; but her deſcriptions raiſe no fluttering deſires in my boſom: and as I am not of a diſpoſition to interfere in the private cabals of the Convent, they are not likely to injure

injure my peace.—I am ſatisfied with my lot; only I wiſh I had it as much in my power to promote your permanent felicity as I have done that of my beloved ſiſter."

Agnes could not refrain from expreſſing her opinion of the natural greatneſs of mind of her engaging young friend, who appeared to be a perfect practical philoſopher; and whoſe innate cheerfulneſs and ſerenity promiſed to enſure her happineſs in the ſtate of life ſhe had choſen. She then entreated Laurana to tell her what ſhe knew reſpecting herſelf, or rather what ſhe feared, ſince it was now poſſible that Siſter Felicia might be prevented by her illneſs from explaining herſelf for ſome days.

"Deareſt Agnes," ſaid Laurana, "I can tell you but little, and that little founded rather on ſurmiſe than on knowledge; but I have already acknowledged that there are cabals in the Convent, and you will be ſurpriſed to hear that you are the ſubject of one."

 "Me!"

"Me!" exclaimed Agnes; "and how can I have become ſo?"

"The Abbeſs, by ſome means, is lately become your enemy," continued Laurana; "ſhe countenances many reports to your diſadvantage; and I know there has been ſome ſecret counſilling held with the portreſs, who has converſed about you with a ſtranger at the gate."

"A ſtranger!" cried Agnes. "What ſtranger can have enquired after me?—Surely, ſurely, it muſt have been Sigiſmond!"

"No," replied Laurana, "not the youth who viſited you when you firſt came—not him. A very different perſon has been to enquire after you; and the Abbeſs gives credit to an idea that you are here under a feigned name; that you placed yourſelf here to eſcape from the power of your father, who had deſtined you for another lover than Sigiſmond; and, in ſhort, it is in contemplation to deliver you up to this father."

Overcome

Overcome with agony inexpressible, Agnes wrung her hands, and fainted in the arms of Laurana. It was with difficulty the kind girl restored her to life, and long ere a flood of salutary tears relieved her oppressed bosom. At length, however, she exclaimed —"Oh my friend! who can have invented this tale? My father died ere I saw the light, honourably in the field of battle: my mother lived from that period in total seclusion in the Villa Salviati, and now she is dead.—No human being exists who has any claim upon me!"

"My sweet friend," replied Laurana, "I believe every word you have uttered, and doubt not but the story they tell of your having escaped with Sigismond from your father's house, is a mere invidious calumny; but certain it is that such a story is told and believed, and that the Abbess, who says she cannot publicly expel from her Convent a person who has committed no offence within it, means to yield you up to the persons who demand you.—Your avowed

reluctance to a monastic life prevents their essaying their accustomed arts upon you, or offering you their protection, on condition of your assuming the veil."

"And who can these people be who demand me?" said Agnes, in a voice of agony. "Who can have any interest, either friendly or malignant, in a poor, isolated individual like me?"

"Dearest Agnes," said Laurana, "the person who demands you is very powerful, and of exalted rank, and the Abbess would not willingly offend him."

"Whoever he be," replied Agnes, "his designs must be evil, since he builds his claim upon a falsehood.—Father I have none, for he lost his life ere I received mine.—Why, Oh why, am I now deprived of the company of Felicia, who seemed in some degree acquainted with my unhappy fate?"

"One circumstance, dear Agnes," observed Laurana, "may afford you some comfort—the annual visit of the Father Abbot to the Convent will take place in a

few

few days; you may then reveal some particulars of your situation to him, and demand his protection: if he grants it, this enemy, powerful as he may be, will not dare to violate the sanctuary of the church."

"This plan, my kind friend," replied Agnes, "does in one view yield me some hope; but suppose the Abbot should refuse me his protection, do I not then forfeit the dignity of innocence by owning that I stand in need of it? And suppose he should accord it on one sole condition, am I not then reduced to a choice of equal evils?—Besides, by explaining any of these circumstances to the Abbot, I involve you, my Laurana, in the offence of having betrayed them to me, and, perhaps, without benefit to myself."

"Your last generous consideration, my friend," answered Laurana, "ought in no wise to prevent your obtaining the possible protection of the Father Abbot; think, at least, of this plan, and if its advantages outweigh its evils, adopt it without fear on my account."

"But

"But why," ſaid Agnes, "ſince I am here a voluntary boarder, why not quit this Convent at once openly and fairly, and ſeek in ſome other the ſecurity I cannot obtain here?"

"Alas, my Agnes!" replied Laurana, "you know not the cruel policy of a Convent; you would not now be permitted to depart, and the very deſire would be made a reaſon for your detention.—To requeſt to go, or even to announce your intention of going, now this cabal has been raiſed about you, would only be to render eſcape impoſſible, by cauſing yourſelf to be watched with unceaſing vigilance.—No, my friend, you are no longer independent."

"Cannot I ſee Father Buonafede?" ſaid Agnes.—"Could not he be ſent for?"

"Alas! alas!" ſaid Laurana, "I grieve to ſhew to you the extent of your unhappineſs! but the Father has been many times refuſed admittance ſince theſe ſad events have occured."

"I am

"I am then bereft of hope!" said Agnes; "there is no one to whom I can appeal!"

"I trust, my friend," replied Laurana, "that your situation is less desperate than your fears represent it to be; at any rate let us endeavour for you again to see Felicia; she is, you say, acquainted with some particulars of your family history."

"She was the sister of the only parent I ever knew, my Laurana," said Agnes; "but the more I reflect on her words when we conversed together, the less ground I find for hope.—When I had told her the circumstances I have now related to you, well do I remember the compassionate look with which she exclaimed—'Dear, innocent, unconscious victim! ignorant of thy fate, of thy connexions!'——What could this imply," dearest Laurana, "but there yet remained some secret behind which had never been revealed to me?"

"I will endeavour," said Laurana, "to visit Sister Felicia;—haply I shall be able to obtain from her either a further explanation,

nation, or a permiſſion for you to repair to her cell."

Agnes thanked Laurana for the friendly intereſt ſhe took in all that concerned her, and regretted that it was now neceſſary for her to retire, as the bell had rung to ſummon the Novices to the chapel.

Left to herſelf, Agnes fell in a ſtupor of miſery which bewildered her thoughts too much to allow her mind to dwell diſtinctly on any one ſubject. Overcome by the ſuddenneſs and magnitude of the evils that now threatened to overwhelm her, cut off from all poſſibility of aſſiſtance, ignorant of the ſource of her miſery, her tearleſs eyes gazed on vacancy, and her benumbed ſenſes refuſed to admit any external object.—Within a horrible confuſion aſſailed her mind, and threatened to unſettle her reaſon.—An unknown father ſuddenly claiming her,—an abſent lover,—Buonafede purpoſely detained from her,—cabals againſt her, who was unconſcious of offence,—reports injurious to her character—all theſe cruel and inexpli-

cable ſubjects of diſtreſs claimed the pre-eminence in her bewildered fancy, and left only one ſentiment clearly diſtinguiſhable—that ſhe was moſt miſerable! Even hope, the laſt reſource of the wretched, was denied to her; for while ſhe was ignorant of the extent of her danger, ſhe knew not on what circumſtance or perſon ſhe dared rely, or in what manner even Heaven itſelf could effect her deliverance. Often as ſhe had walked in the gardens of the Convent, had ſhe remarked the impoſſibility of eſcape, not with a view to her own ſituation, for ſhe then believed herſelf free and independent; but when ſhe thought of thoſe unhappy victims, whoſe melancholy countenances, and deſponding manners, proved their diſlike to the life they had embraced, the height of the walls, the thickneſs and ſecurity of the gates, the ſtrict watch continually obſerved, and the rigorous rules of the Convent, ſeemed to preclude all poſſibility of flight, and ſhe remembered theſe circum-

ſtances

ſtances with extreme diſmay, now ſhe was herſelf a priſoner in the Convent.

It was in vain to demand by what right the Abbeſs exerciſed this authority over one who had entered merely as a boarder, to obtain a temporary retreat during the period of intenſe grief for a loſt parent; or upon what principles ſhe refuſed admiſſion to Father Buonafede, who might, perhaps, have aſſiſted her with his counſels, and enabled her to eſcape.—Who ſhould queſtion the authority of a woman deſpotic within her little ſovereignty, and whoſe plauſible manners could put any gloſs upon her actions to all but thoſe whom ſhe injured? Agnes felt convinced that no ſuſpicious reaſons had been alledged to Buonafede for his not being admitted, ſince he would have readily taken the alarm; and as for ſending him any private information, this ſhe knew was utterly impoſſible, ſince by what means could ſhe ſend unknown to the Abbeſs or her emiſſaries? The more ſhe reflected, the leſs end ſhe ſaw to her miſery; yet her

chief

chief apprehensions rested on this person who claimed her under the title of a father. She could not believe that her mother would have suffered her to remain ignorant of so important a circumstance; yet when she recollected the suddenness of Madame St. Clair's death, and the messenger she had dispatched to some person, with the news of the intended marriage between her and Sigismond, new terrors seemed to oppress her.—This messenger had never returned. Was it possible that he had been sent to a yet surviving father? and if it were, why had she never known this parent?—Was he unworthy of a mother's regard? If so, why consult him on account of the marriage? If not unworthy, why had they never met? Yet surely if that parent still existed, and had been a proper protector for her, her mother would not have been so anxious to secure her the protection of Sigismond. Her very great earnestness on this subject now perpetually recurred to her, and strengthened her fear of this unknown father.

Her

Her mother then knew, perhaps, that ſuch a being exiſted; and it was to ſave Agnes from him that ſhe ſo anxiouſly wiſhed to ſee her the wife of Sigiſmond. A tear of regret, that ſhe had not ſecured that aſylum, at length guſhed from her burning eyes, and relieved her throbbing temples, which had nearly burſt with the intenſity of her ſufferings; ſhe now wept plentifully, and had it not been for this ſalutary relief, reaſon, perhaps, would have yielded to the rude attacks of grief—grief ſo ſudden, ſo irremediable, ſo violent, that a ſtronger frame than that of Agnes might have ſunk under it.

## CHAP. V.

"O'er yon wild waſte of ruin thron'd, what form
"Beats her ſwoln breaſt, and tears her unkempt hair?
"Why ſeems the ſpectre thus to court the ſtorm?
"Why glare her full fix'd eyes in ſtern deſpair?"

SOUTHEY.

AGNES remained weeping alone till after the midnight ſervice was over, when a light footſtep near her door rouſed her. The whiſpering voice of Laurana met her ear, and ſhe readily admitted her. The amiable girl came to her from Felicia, who was too ill to attend the meetings of the Siſters, and who earneſtly requeſted to ſee Agnes in her cell.

"In the preſent ſtate of things, dear Agnes," continued Laurana, "you would not

not be permitted to make this visit; but now that all the Nuns are retired, I hope to be able to conduct you to her in safety."

Agnes arose; and Laurana shuddered to see the ravages a few hours of misery had made in her delicate frame. Pale, trembling, and enfeebled, she leaned on her kind friend and earnestly exerted her little remaining strength to reach the cell of Sister Felicia. They passed with light, inaudible steps along the narrow passages and long galleries, into which, on each side, opened innumerable doors, belonging to the small cells of the Nuns. These passages, totally dark but for the lamp Laurana carried, and which she was obliged to shroud for fear of exciting suspicion, seemed endless to the almost fainting Agnes, who trembled when she learned that Sister Felicia was removed to the infirmary, which was up a flight of stairs, and still at some distance.—she endeavoured, however, to rally her failing spirits, and at length they reached the top of the stairs. They approached the cell of

Felicia,

Felicia, and ſtopping a moment at the door to liſten, the ſound of voices within convinced them they muſt not yet enter. They heard the Father Confeſſor of the Convent in prayer, in which the feeble voice of Felicia occaſionally joined. This delay overcame Agnes, who trembled almoſt to fainting. Laurana aſſiſted her to reach a more diſtant part of the gallery, where a kind of receſs would enable her to avoid the ſight of the Friar; and watched herſelf near the door, where ſhe heard the Father begin an urgent exhortation to the Siſter, which, from the tenor of it, was not likely ſoon to end. She came back to comfort the oppreſſed Agnes; and after an interval, which ſeemed to both moſt tedious, the door at length opened, and Laurana inſtantly extinguiſhed her light. The Friar carried one, which ſerved to ſhew his long black figure in all its horror; and the ſpirits of Agnes, almoſt overcome by the late events, nearly ſunk beneath the effect of it. At length he was out of ſight, and Laurana

came to draw her friend from her obſcure receſs, and conduct her to Felicia.

The poor invalid raiſed her head at the entrance of Agnes, and a gleam of pleaſure paſſed over her countenance.

"My child," ſaid ſhe, "earneſtly have I wiſhed to ſee thee once more, but now our interview muſt not be long. I ſhall not be ſuffered to remain alone; let me, therefore, haſten to what is material. My Agnes, bring me that caſket."

Agnes obeyed, and the trembling hands of the Nun having opened it, took from it two portraits. One of theſe ſhe delivered to Agnes, who recognized the figure of her mother.

"This," ſaid Felicia, putting the other into her hands, "this was your father!—Let me not ſee it. I never thought to have touched it again, but neceſſity has overcome horror."

"A ghaſtly paleneſs overſpread the face of the Nun as ſhe ſpoke; and while Agnes was gazing on the features of her beloved mother,

mother, a convulſive hickup ſeized Felicia, and ſhe fainted. Senſible of the neceſſity of calling in aſſiſtance, Laurana conjured Agnes to conceal the pictures and the caſket, and to endeavour to return to her own apartment; but Agnes was incapable of leaving Felicia, and haſtily putting away the miniatures, joined Laurana in attempting to recover the ſuffering Nun. At length ſhe opened her eyes, and faintly articulated —"Adieu!—not now."

Agnes underſtood that the exertion would be now too much for her, and regretted that ſhe was not permitted to watch by the bedſide of her only ſurviving relative. Footſteps along the paſſage now announced the approach of the attendant on the ſick, and Agnes and Laurana haſtily retired, taking every precaution to eſcape obſervation. They ſucceeded; and after ſome time reached the cell of Agnes in ſafety, where Laurana remained until ſhe had ſeen her friend ſomething relieved from her

her fatigue and agitation, and then retired to her own mattrefs.

Agnes, once more alone, drew forth the pictures, and recalled the words of Felicia —" Neceffity has overcome horror!"— " Alas! then," thought fhe, " my father was an object of horror to the fifter of my mother!—Oh God! and if he lives, to him I fhall be yielded up!—Dreadful is my deftiny! What philofophy, what fortitude, fhall enable me to endure it?"

She wept over the well-known features of her beloved mother, and almoft fhuddered to look at thofe of her other parent. Long did fhe hold the cafe without daring to unclofe it; her trembling hand refufed to prefs the fpring; fhe knew not what to expect, yet fhe longed to view a countenance fo nearly connected with her. It feemed as if the fight of the picture would unfold many fecret horrors of which fhe was yet ignorant; and while fhe yet hefitated to open the cafe, it fell from her feeble grafp, and in falling, unfolded. She ftooped to take

take it up, and at length fixed her eyes upon the reſemblance of her father! The portrait repreſented a young, athletic, martial figure, with fine features, and a commanding aſpect. The countenance, however, demanded no love from Agnes: it touched none of the finer ſprings of feeling in her heart, and ſhe gazed at it with a calmneſs which ſhe wondered at when ſhe recollected her late emotion. She determined to imprint upon her memory thoſe features which, perhaps, were now mouldered into duſt, or if not, which ſhe could never ſurvey living without horror; the dark impending eyebrow, the eye of fire, the aquiline noſe, the projecting chin, the dark large locks of curling hair, ſhe remarked with a nicety of obſervation that would enable her to recognize them, even with all the alteration occaſioned by a long lapſe of years; but a deep ſcar under the left eye ſhe thought ſhe could never forget; and, cloſing again a caſe which had cauſed her ſo much agitation, ſhe fixed her eyes once more on the ſoft and melancholy

 countenance

countenance of her mother: it had been drawn in early youth, and displayed even more of beauty than Agnes had expected. Fine as had been the form, and enchanting as had been the face of that beloved and tender parent, yet an expreſſion of exquiſite ſorrow had wholly obliterated that ſweet playfulneſs which, in latter years, and with recovered tranquillity, had occaſionally reanimated her features—a playfulneſs which ſometimes overcame even the languor of ill health, and rendered her evident decay doubly intereſting.

While Agnes was thus employed, the chapel bell rung, and as it was not yet the hour of matins, ſo ſingular a circumſtance cauſed her no ſmall ſurpriſe; ſhe ſoon found, however, that all the Nuns were preparing to obey the ſignal, and curioſity, and an intereſt even beyond curioſity, led her alſo to join the train. At the door of her cell ſhe met Laurana, who was coming, with tears in her eyes, to inform her that Felicia was expiring, and that the bell ſummoned

ſummoned all the Siſterhood to the chapel, where the Father Confeſſor was to adminiſter extreme unction, and perform the ſervice for the dying.

Extremely affected, Agnes haſtily threw on a veil, and followed to the chapel. The poor invalid was already there, and weak as ſhe was, appeared devoutly praying. By the time her heavy eyes perceived the weeping Agnes, the Father Confeſſor was arrived, and all the community were aſſembled, ſo that it was neceſſary to reſtrain the impatience ſo viſible in her countenance, to utter, perhaps, the moſt important intelligence. Agnes too plainly underſtood the expreſſion of the dying Nun's fine features, and trembled leſt death ſhould for ever cloſe her lips ere ſhe had imparted information of ſo much conſequence.

The anthem began; a low and ſolemn chant ſeemed gradually to win upon ſilence, till, by degrees, every voice united in one ſolemn peal, ſwelling through the vaulted aiſles; and again, after a burſt of univerſal

melody, softly sinking away through similar gradations, to a "dying, dying fall!" The service next followed uninterrupted, save by the short, frequent sobs of its lamented object, and was succeeded by another anthem; it was an air frequently used, and in which the voice of Felicia had been particularly heard. Agnes most sensibly felt the loss of those angelic tones, which had often made her bosom thrill with rapture ere she knew that they proceeded from her nearest relative. At length it was finished, and Agnes approached the bier on which the expiring saint was laid: her feeble eyes were illumined with a faint sparkle, and a smile of affection played about her lips; her respiration was short and uneasy, and with difficulty she uttered—"Those pictures—your father——"

"I have them," replied Agnes; "but, Oh say, my father, does he live?"

Felicia fixed her fading eyeballs on Agnes, and made many efforts to articulate; but

but they were in vain, and her last sigh escaped without her uttering another word.

The distress of Agnes for the loss of so lately discovered a friend, was greatly heightened by the dreadful uncertainty in which her fate was now involved; and she was totally unobserving of the malignant eyes that were scowling upon her from under many veils around her. She could not suppose it possible that at so awful a moment human passions could intrude themselves into any bosom, more especially into those that were devoted to religion; and it was not till the attendants approached to remove the bier, that she became sensible of her situation, or that she heard the voice of the Abbess desiring her to retire to her cell. It was now impossible for Laurana to accompany her, and Agnes was obliged to pass these hours of intense grief wholly alone. She felt the more severely too, from the idea which continually assailed her, that the immediate death of Felicia was owing to the shock given to her spirits in the conversation

ſhe had held with her; and ſhe accuſed herſelf of having involuntarily ſhortened that life ſhe would have done ſo much to preſerve.

In this ſituation, overwhelmed both with certain and with apprehended miſery, ſhe remained in a ſort of ſtupor, from which ſhe was at length rouſed by a footſtep at her door, and a low voice demanding permiſſion to enter. Fearful of ſhe knew not what, Agnes trembled to grant the permiſſion ſhe had no plea for withholding, and which ſhe regretted not when ſhe beheld an aged Nun, whoſe mild and conciliating countenance in an inſtant beſpoke her affection and confidence. The old Nun, whoſe eyes were bathed in tears, held out her arms with an air of kindneſs, which it was not in the heart of Agnes to withſtand; ſhe flung herſelf into them, and they mingled their tears together.

Almoſt the only diſtinct ſenſation which Agnes at this moment experienced, was that of joy for having found a new friend at a period

a period when ſhe ſtood ſo much in need of one; and the old Nun, having ſuffered her tears to flow without interruption, until ſhe ſeemed of herſelf to recover a degree of tranquillity, then told her that ſhe had been appointed the attendant on the poor Felicia in her laſt hours, and that ſhe had moſt earneſtly recommended Agnes to her friendſhip. This care, extending itſelf beyond the grave, moſt forcibly affected Agnes; and ſhe would have ſuffered a return of the violence of her ſorrow, had not the Nun judiciouſly calmed her mind, and induced her to liſten to her converſation.

"I was pleaſed with your appearance, my daughter," ſaid ſhe, "as ſoon as I ſaw you, and needed not the recommendation of Felicia to become your friend. As ſoon as I found there were thoſe in the Convent who choſe to be your enemies, I reſolved to do what I could to aſſiſt you; and I truſt that if you will rely upon me, I ſhall even now be able to extricate you from your difficulties."

 This

This cheering assurance revived the heart of Agnes; and Sister Thomasine, after advising her not to appear dismayed by any thing she might hear, turned the conversation on the poor departed Felicia.

Agnes, eager to learn every circumstance relating to her family, anxiously enquired if Sister Thomasine remembered the first entrance of her aunt into the community; and having received an answer in the affirmative, asked to what family she belonged.

"Is it possible," said the old Nun, "that, nearly related as you are, you should be ignorant that she was of the noble House of Mirandola?"

"Of Mirandola!" exclaimed Agnes.

"And sister," resumed Sister Thomasine, "to the late unfortunate Marquis, who lost his life so prematurely, just as he was beginning to enjoy it."

"Good Heavens!" cried Agnes; "was then my mother sister to that unhappy man whose monument I have so often watered with tears of compassion and veneration? Alas!

Alas! my mother was, doubtless, too deeply touched with the memory of those misfortunes to allow her to expatiate upon them even to me, and the suddenness of her death prevented her elucidating these circumstances."

"Your mother," replied Thomasine, with a significant air, "might have many reasons for concealing her connexion with the House of Mirandola."

"What reasons?" demanded Agnes, with evident interest.

"My child," answered the Nun, "there are those living who wish every memorial of Mirandola extirpated from the earth."

"And why?" said Agnes, much astonished.

"It is not for me," replied the Nun, "plunged in monastic seclusion, to penetrate the motives of the wicked, nor does it import you, my daughter, to fathom them; facts are all that can be of consequence to you."

"Perhaps," said Agnes, hesitating, "as you

you were the friend of my deceaſed aunt, you were informed of ſome further particulars relating to my family?—Perhaps you know whether my father yet lives?"

"Your father!" ſaid Thomaſine; "do you know who is your father?"

"I always underſtood," replied Agnes, "that my father was a French Officer, of the name of St. Clair, and that he died before I ſaw the light."

"And do you not ſtill believe this?" aſked the Nun.

"I ſcarcely know," ſaid Agnes.

"And whence," cried Siſter Thomaſine, "ariſes ſo ſtrange a doubt?"

"From the manner of Felicia," replied Agnes.

"It was inconcluſive," obſerved the Nun; "I ſee no reaſon for you to doubt the death of your father."

Agnes was ſtruck with the manner of Siſter Thomaſine. She could not be ignorant of the claims now ſet up by a perſon calling himſelf her father; ſhe had acknow-

ledged

ledged that there were ſome in the Convent who choſe, as ſhe expreſſed it, to be enemies to Agnes, and yet ſhe confirmed the idea that her father was no more. For a moment ſuſpicion of the Nun glanced acroſs her mind; but ſhe gazed at her venerable countenance, impreſſed at once with the marks of age, and the ſtamp of virtue, and ſhe diſmiſſed for ever the unworthy inmate.

"Tell me then," cried Agnes, forcibly graſping the arm of the Siſter, "tell me then who it is that demands me, and by what claim any one can make ſuch a demand?"

"My child," replied the Nun, "have you fortitude ſufficient to hear the horrid tale? It will require your utmoſt exertion."

"Oh! tell me all," ſaid Agnes; "certain miſery can never equal that which terror and imagination heighten."

"Liſten to me then, my daughter," ſaid the kind-hearted Siſter, "and I will relate all that has from the beginning conſpired

conſpired to create you theſe enemies in the Convent, and that now threaten you with ſuch terrible miſery."

Agnes ſhuddered; but by a ſtrong effort ſummoned all her compoſure, and the Nun began her recital.

"When Siſter Felicia," ſaid Thomaſine, "had been ſome time eſtabliſhed in the Convent, ſhe heard ſome intelligence that overwhelmed her with grief. It was not the premature death of her brother that ſhe lamented—that did not take place till after this circumſtance; but ſhe was reſerved and communicated to no one a ſecret that preyed deeply on her peace. A new Siſter, ſome time after, told a tale that explained the ſorrow of Felicia, but the tale was not generally believed; ſome, however, gave it full credit, and the hiſtory has ſlept in their malignant minds, to be brought forward at ſome future period with increaſed effect. The circumſtance related, was that a Siſter of Felicia's had left a Convent, in which her father had placed her, and put herſelf under

under the protection of a French Nobleman, nearly related to her family; and who, in the event of her father dying without male heirs, would succeed to all the family honours. It is well known that the family of Mirandola was numerous; but as there was only one ſon, it ſeemed as if there need have been no difficulty in providing for the daughters without reſorting to religious ſecluſion; however, it was again ſaid that the eſtates were ſo tied up to the male heir, that nothing could be done for the daughters. Since your arrival here, dear Agnes, this old tale has been revived, with the preſumption, that as you bore a French name, and were, from your countenance, immediately believed by Felicia to be the daughter of her ſiſter, you were the illegitimate offspring of this eloped Novice and the before-mentioned French Nobleman. Upon the claims ſet up by this ſtranger, who demands you as his daughter, the tale has gained new credit; ſince this is the very man who has ſucceeded to all the eſtates of Mirandola,

with a new acquisition of honour;—thus exalted in rank, powerful in connexions, and wealthy in possessions, the Abbess dares neither refuse you to his demand, nor violate the sanctity of her house by delivering you up without some plea against you. How their machinations will enable them to effect this, I know not; but this I know, that you must endeavour to effect your escape before their plans are sufficiently matured."

Agnes had listened to this tale with a personal terror which superseded all other reflections, and only exclaimed—"Escape! Oh, to escape is impossible! and if it were not,—whither, to whom could I fly?"

"Do not rashly conclude, my child," said Thomasine, "that escape is impossible because it is difficult; and where can you so readily seek protection as with the venerable Buonafede, who has so often enquired for you, and so often, under various pretences, been refused admission?"

"Alas!" replied Agnes, "the first place they will seek for me in will be the habitation

of

of Buonafede; had I not better demand protection of the Father Abbot, whose annual visit to the Convent will be made in a few days?"

"And under what pretence, my daughter," said the venerable Nun, "would you request his protection? Would not the very demand imply that those who claim, have a right to possess you? No, my child, the Father Abbot is not a man to yield to the solicitations of the unfortunate, any thing that would militate against the wishes of the powerful. His visit, as it usually occasions much bustle, may, perhaps, enable us to effect your escape; but in no other way can it be of service to you."

"But you have not yet told me," said Agnes, "who it is that pretends to be my father—does he bear the name of Mirandola?"

"No," replied the Nun; "he is now called Prince Rezzonico."

Agnes uttered a faint scream, and sunk senseless on the bed. The assiduities of the

Nun

Nun at length reſtored her ſenſes, and when ſhe ſaw her again a little compoſed, ſhe enquired the reaſon of this extraordinary agitation, and Agnes replied—" Alas! this Rezzonico is ſo ſtrangely, yet ſecretly connected with all my intereſts, that I tremble at his name. The Villa Salviati, in which I reſided with my mother, belonged to him. It is he who has withdrawn Sigiſmond from the protection of Father Buonafede, and now he claims me as his child!"

" Do you recollect, my child, whether your mother knew that Prince Rezzonico was the proprietor of the Villa Salviati?"

" Oh yes, ſhe knew it well!" replied Agnes.

" And did ſhe betray no particular agitation at his name?" aſked the Siſter.

" None," replied Agnes.

" Then," ſaid Thomaſine, " I ſhould moſt entirely diſbelieve theſe ſtrange hiſtories, and I doubt not but all your apprehenſions will vaniſh, and your future life will be as unclouded as your innocence and virtues

virtues merit.—Depend on me, my child, and ſhould the Abbeſs ſummon and queſtion you, adhere ſimply to the facts you have always been accuſtomed to conſider as certain; acknowledge no acquaintance with any thing beyond, and conceal the alarm which now agitates you.—Depend on it, my Agnes, Providence will not forſake the innocent.—Inform me of all that happens, and you ſhall eſcape from this pretended father, who claims you, I fear, with no good intention."

The ſame expreſſion which had before ſtruck Agnes, now paſſed acroſs the countenance of Siſter Thomaſine; and Agnes eagerly demanded with what intentions Prince Rezzonico could claim her.

"Are you not a deſcendant of the Houſe of Mirandola?" ſaid the Nun.—And ſhe quitted the cell.

Her words vibrated on the ear of Agnes without raiſing any correſponding idea; till at length her former obſervation, "that thoſe were ſtill living who would wiſh every memorial

memorial of Mirandola extirpated from the earth," recurred to her mind, and dreadful visions of murder floated before her imagination, already filled with sufficient horrors.

---

## CHAP. VI.

" Why does the red blood hasten from thy cheek?
" The cold dew damp thy face? Thy shaking knees
" Can scarce support thee!"

SAYER.

THE day had begun to dawn ere Thomasine left the cell of Agnes, who, when she was alone, endeavoured to disentangle the quick succeeding distresses which had so suddenly involved her. In vain she considered all that had passed; she felt herself utterly unable to solve the mysteries that surrounded her,

her, and which seemed like so many flitting shadows, which her imagination was utterly incapable of discerning distinctly; and which, though they oppressed her feelings, bore no determinate form. That Prince Rezzonico should be her father, appeared to her impossible; that her sainted mother should have so strangely deviated from propriety, was still more incredible to her, who had been spared, by the tender delicacy of Sigismond, from hearing the recital of Madame St. Clair's confession. She could not conceive it possible to have regained such a degree of tranquillity as her mother had appeared to possess; but she knew not, she could not imagine the motives that urged Madame St. Clair to fortitude. The welfare of that daughter, for whom alone she lived, depended wholly on the steadiness of her philosophy. The tears she shed in secret, were unknown to the unconscious Agnes; as was the influence of mild and persevering religion, and the gradual effect of time in soothing every sorrow.

That

That Madame St. Clair had concealed her near relationſhip to the Marquis di Mirandola, appeared ſtill more inexplicable to Agnes. Alas! what would ſhe have felt had ſhe known that all the family diſclaimed her, and forbade her to conſider herſelf as belonging to them! Which of them knew, what, indeed, ſhe had ſcarcely unfolded even to Buonafede, the long reſiſtance ſhe had made, the arts that had been employed to conquer her, the perſeverance with which ſhe demanded and obtained a ſubſequent marriage, and the cruel fraud with which ſhe had, in that inſtance, been deluded. Would their jealous Italian pride have yielded that pardon which Heaven willingly granted to her inceſſant prayers, her unfeigned repentance, the active virtues, the mild philoſophy of her ſubſequent life?

All theſe particulars Agnes knew not, nor could imagine; infamy, opprobrium, haunted her fancy; perſecution ſtared her in the face; one moment ſhe dreaded to be branded as the offspring of vice and credulity;

the

the next ſhe trembled leſt ſhe ſhould be murdered, as a deſcendant of the Houſe of Mirandola. Oppreſſed with all theſe varying and bewildering ideas, ſhe felt almoſt relieved when a ſummons from the Lady Abbeſs awoke her from her vague reverie of miſery; and haſtily calling to mind the judicious advice of her new friend, Siſter Thomaſine, ſhe ſtrove to quiet the various feelings that agitated her boſom, as ſhe proceeded to the parlour of the Lady Abbeſs.

With the Lady Abbeſs ſhe had hitherto had very little communication; having been received into the houſe as a boarder who had no view of ever becoming a member of their ſociety, and having laboured under an oppreſſive languor, which had prevented her from joining in the uſual occupations by which the inmates of a Convent ſtrive to baniſh *ennui*, ſhe had ſeen little of the perſonage before whom ſhe was now to preſent herſelf.

A woman, paſt the prime of life, fat, ſmiling,

ſmiling, and ſtill handſome, was the portraiture of the Superior of the Convent. She received Agnes with a gracious cordiality, which ſerved in part to diſſipate her fears, and, taking her hand, led her to a ſeat.

"Daughter," ſaid ſhe, with a ſmiling countenance, "we are not accuſtomed in theſe retreats to encourage an idle curioſity; I truſt, therefore, you will not impute to ſo mean a motive the queſtions I am going to aſk, but believe that your own peculiar welfare prompts the intereſt I take in your concerns."

Agnes bowed to this friendly exordium, and the Lady Abbeſs proceeded.

"Suffer me, my daughter, to enquire the name and quality of your father?"

"His name," ſaid Agnes, with as much unconcern as ſhe could command, "was St. Clair; and he was an Officer in the French ſervice."

"And when did you ſee him?" aſked the Superior.

"Never

"Never," replied Agnes; "he died before I was born."

"Are you sure of this?" said the Lady Abbess.

"To be sure of that which happened previous to my birth is, perhaps," replied Agnes, "strictly speaking, impossible; but I have always understood this to be the truth."

"Your father's name then was the same as that you bear?" observed the Abbess.

"Undoubtedly," said Agnes.

"I had been otherwise informed," returned the Abbess; "and that for reasons best known to yourself and your friends, you were not distinguished by the name of your father."

"I have never known any other," resumed Agnes; "my mother was called St. Clair."

"Your mother?" retorted the Abbess. "But pray, my daughter, if you have never doubted of your father's death, whence

arofe thofe earneft enquiries to the dying Sifter Felicia, whether he yet lived?"

"Sifter Felicia," faid Agnes, "was my aunt."

"So I underftood," faid the Abbefs; "but that is no anfwer to my queftion, why you enquired fo earneftly whether your father yet lived?"

Agnes, who had no idea that thefe enquiries had been overheard at all, was fure they muft have been reported to the Lady Abbefs, fince fhe had been by no means near enough at the moment of Felicia's death to have heard them herfelf."

"You muft," refumed the Abbefs, with an appearance of affection and candour to which the heart of Agnes was but too ready to furrender itfelf, "you muft forgive my feeming impertinence, my daughter, but if you have had any doubts refpecting the death of your father, it muft be defirable to you to have them cleared up. A foldier is often reported dead when he yet furvives; and, after many years of abfence, returns to his

his family crowned with new honours.—Tell me, my daughter, should you not rejoice to hear news of your father?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Agnes, with a faltering voice.

"Well, my child," ſaid the Abbeſs, with an air of kindneſs, "I ſee you are agitated; retire now to your chamber, be obedient, and hope every thing."

Agnes curtſied, and retired, glad to be diſmiſſed, trembling at the ſtrange events which ſeemed gathering around her, and not knowing whither to turn for refuge. She felt, therefore, much relieved to ſee the old Nun Thomaſine in her cell, though ſhe aſſured her ſhe had not time to ſtay many minutes, as the bell would ſoon ſummon them to the chapel, when Agnes, weeping, haſtily told her the ſubſtance of the converſation ſhe had held with the Abbeſs.

"Poor child!" ſaid Thomaſine, tenderly embracing her, "your fate preſſes hard upon you;—hark! there is the bell.—Adieu, dear Agnes! I ſhall think of you all

all prayer time, and will come back as ſoon as they are over."

Agnes ſaw the old Nun depart with a ſenſation of deſpondency, and throwing herſelf on her mattreſs, wept with no diſtinct conſciouſneſs of any thing but that ſhe was miſerable. The moments moved heavily while thus employed; but Thomaſine was true to her word, and returned as ſoon as ſhe could eſcape obſervation."

"My dear child," ſaid the good old Nun, "the thoughts of your ſituation have engaged my attention during the whole time of prayer; ſomething muſt be done, and ſpeedily too, for I am apprehenſive they mean to deliver you up very ſoon to the emiſſaries of your father, or at leaſt of this Prince, who claims you as his child.—I have a friend who is in the councils of the Lady Abbeſs, but who does not know that I am your friend—if ſhe did, ſhe would not be ſo communicative; but ſhe told me that they had planned it for the Abbeſs to endeavour to intereſt your feelings and filial piety, to

induce

induce you to wiſh to go to your father, and alſo to dazzle your imagination by deſcriptions of his rank and magnificence; but that if you did not voluntarily agree to depart immediately, advantage would be taken of the approaching feſtival, to have you yielded up to his dependants."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Agnes, "how am I to avoid the ſnares which ſurround me? If I conſent to go, immediate advantage will be taken of it, and I ſhall be put into the hands of my jailers.—If I expreſs a preference of my preſent way of life, I ſhall be betrayed into their power by ſtratagem!—Deareſt mother, can you imagine any means by which I can elude this Prince Rezzonico, from whom my heart revolts with inſurmountable abhorrence?"

"Have you courage to brave ſome difficulties to avoid him?" aſked Siſter Thomaſine.

"To brave any thing you can propoſe," replied Agnes.

 "Well

"Well then," ſaid Thomaſine, "I will now leave you to prepare the way for you; and when all the Siſters are retired to reſt, I will return, and conduct you to a place where, if you have courage to remain, you will be ſafe; and during the buſtle occaſioned by the Father Abbot's viſit, we ſhall probably be enabled to effect your eſcape. But I muſt now leave you inſtantly, that it may not be ſuppoſed to be a colluſion between us."

"Alas!" ſaid Agnes, mournfully, "how ſhall I ſupport myſelf when you are gone? Apprehenſion threatens to overpower my reaſon; and ſuppoſe I ſhould be again ſummoned to the Abbeſs, how may I avoid my inſtant fate?"

"You will ſcarcely be ſummoned to the parlour again this evening," replied Thomaſine; "the Abbeſs rarely tranſacts any but the moſt material buſineſs in an evening; ſhe uſually devotes theſe hours to eaſe and recreation, and I ſhall probably this evening be myſelf in the parlour.—

Adieu

Adieu then, dear Agnes! rely on me; and we ſhall yet effect your freedom from this dreadful abode."

"And do you call it dreadful?" ſaid Agnes, willing to prolong the ſtay of her friend.

"To me it is ſo no longer," anſwered the Nun; "but to you, in every light, it muſt be dreadful.—The only point of view in which a Convent can appear deſirable, is when it offers a refuge from perſecution; to you it threatens that perſecution, and nothing but inſtantly offering to become a member of the community, would induce the Lady Abbeſs to give you her protection; nay, perhaps ſhe may be ſo blinded by the power, and ſeduced by the wealth of your pretended father, that even that ſacrifice would be inſufficient to prompt her to ſhelter you from his demands."

"Ah, deareſt mother!" ſaid Agnes, "what motive can prompt this ſtranger to get me into his hands? What intereſt can he have in the affair, powerful enough to lead

lead him to oppreſs the innocent, the helpleſs, and the ſtranger?"

"A lineal deſcendant of the Houſe of Mirandola can never be innocent in the eyes of Rezzonico," replied Thomaſine. "Your helpleſſneſs is an argument in favour of his cauſe, ſince the wicked are always daſtards; and ſince he knows your lineage, you are no longer a ſtranger to him.—But now, my child, farewel! Prepare for your departure; make up what is neceſſary into a ſmall parcel, ſince to this cell, I truſt, you will return no more.—I will take care you ſhall be ſupplied with food during your abode in the place whither I mean to conduct you, and whence I hope ſoon to effect your complete liberation."

Agnes embraced the good Nun, and, bidding her a mournful adieu, ſaw her depart with infinite regret. Some time elapſed in unavailing tears and uſeleſs ſorrow, till at length ſhe rouſed herſelf, and began to follow the directions of her good friend; and making up a packet of the moſt

neceſſary

neceſſary articles, forgot not to put into it the papers ſhe had been examining when Felicia firſt viſited her, and which ſhe had never ſince reſumed. She determined, however, to read them all carefully, ſince it was poſſible ſome of them might contain intelligence important to her future happineſs; ſhe lamented that this little occupation was at an end, ſince now that ſhe was no longer employed, apprehenſion and diſtreſs ſeemed to overwhelm her faculties with double force. She paced up and down her narrow cell, thought the minutes lingered in their flight, caught every paſſing noiſe in the Convent, and forgot that Thomaſine propoſed not to return until all the Siſters were buried in ſleep. At length ſhe heard a footſtep approach; her heart beat quicker; the ſound ſtopped at her door, but no one tapped, or ſpoke. Alarmed, ſhe knew not why, Agnes ſoftly approached the door, but heard nothing; for ſome moments ſhe ſtood immoveable, liſtening for the lighteſt noiſe from without, and at length thought ſhe

heard her own name repeated twice in a whiſpering voice, while a ruſtling in the paſſage made her imagine there were more perſons than one. She trembled univerſally; ſhe dreaded every moment to have the door forced by ſome emiſſaries from the Prince, and impriſonment and murder ſhot athwart her brain; ſhe ſtood in extreme diſtreſs, ſcarcely daring to breathe, much leſs to leave her ſtation, yet almoſt unable to ſupport herſelf upright; cold ſweat ran down her forehead, and every drop of blood forſook her cheeks:—ſhe feared every moment that ſhe ſhould fall fainting to the ground, when the noiſe would infallibly embolden her perſecutors to force the door of her cell, and to convey her away while ſhe lay yet inſenſible. Her yielding limbs now almoſt refuſed to ſupport her, when ſhe heard the lighteſt poſſible tap at the door, followed by the words—“ Dear Agnes!” in a whiſper, but a whiſper in which ſhe recognized the voice of Laurana. Feeble and exhauſted, ſhe opened the door; and, over-

come

come by the revulſion occaſioned by the ſudden change from terror to comparative ſecurity, fainted inſtantly in the arms of Laurana. The affectionate girl, ſcarcely equal to ſuſtain her ſenſeleſs burthen, contrived to draw her to the mattreſs, and in a few minutes reſtored her to life, when ſhe eagerly enquired the cauſe of this violent perturbation.

Agnes confided to her faithful boſom the hiſtory of her preſent ſituation, and felt a relief in talking over, with ſo kind and conſiderate a friend, the troubles ſhe ſuffered, and thoſe from which ſhe hoped to eſcape. She mentioned the name of Thomaſine, of whom Laurana merely ſaid ſhe knew her very little; but ſince ſhe was the friend of Agnes, ſhe would cultivate her acquaintance more carefully. Agnes eagerly enquired if Laurana feared that ſhe ſhould entruſt herſelf to Thomaſine; but Laurana replied—"No, ſhe believed her to be worthy; but ſhe herſelf, from the inequality of their

ages, had not been mu admitted to her acquaintance."

Agnes was ſatisfied with this reply, and much relieved by the opportunity, obtained with ſo much alarm, of opening her mind to Laurana, on whoſe friendſhip ſhe felt the moſt perfect reliance, and for whom ſhe had the warmeſt affection. The moment now arrived in which ſhe was to bid an eternal farewel to this amiable girl, who, though ſhe cordially rejoiced in the hope of Agnes's eſcape from her enemies, yet grieved to loſe a friend ſhe loved ſo tenderly. Their arms enfolded each other, and their warm hearts beat againſt each kindred boſom; when Laurana, ſuddenly diſengaging herſelf, ſaid—" It is fortunate that there is a neceſſity for me to go, for I ſhould overpower you with my ſorrow; yet this ſorrow, ſweet Agnes, poignant as it is, will be one of the greateſt comforts of my future life, when time ſhall have ſoftened it down to a gentle regret, and I ſhall remember with delight that I was the beloved friend

of

of my Agnes then, I, hope, enjoying every happineſs with her Sigiſmond."

"Deareſt Laurana," replied Agnes, "dark as are my future proſpects, and gloomy as are the preſent moments of my life, never ſhall I forget your generous affection, but ſhall remember it with real pleaſure amidſt all the diſtreſſes I may be expoſed to."

Laurana dared not prolong the moments of adieu; and left her friend much re-animated by a viſit ſo well-timed and ſo cordial.

She now waited in much perturbation for the arrival of Thomaſine; but for this ſhe had yet ſome hours to wait—hours which ſhe had no means of beguiling. No longer could imagination ſooth her, or paint the future in gay, bewitching colours; reaſon refuſed to illumine the picture, and withering hope dared not to look upon it. A gloomy deſpair, an indeſcribable alarm, tinctured all the future with the blackeſt hues. She knew Sigiſmond to be in the power of that

Prince whom ſhe was now ſeeking to elude; and what fate he might intend for that hapleſs youth, ſhe knew not, but ſhe feared it would not be a happy one. Sometimes ſhe regretted that ſhe had not conſented to his repeated entreaties, and united their fates paſt the power of man to ſeparate them; but again ſhe reflected that their marriage would not have placed them beyond the reach of ſorrow—it would only have made them feel each other's woe ſtill more ſeverely.

Alas, wretched Agnes! little doſt thou imagine that the moment can ever arrive when thou ſhalt fly with horror from that union thou now ſo fondly contemplateſt as the end of all thy ſorrows!

At length ſhe heard the Nuns paſs one after another to their ſeveral cells, and ſhe watched in momentary expectation of Thomaſine; ſtill, however, one quarter of an hour elapſed after another, and every time the Convent bell chimed, ſhe truſted ſhe ſhould hear her footſteps. At laſt, ſo much time had paſſed, that ſhe began to

fear

ſear Thomaſine would not come till after the midnight ſervice; and ſhe reſigned herſelf quietly to wait till then, when ſhe ſuddenly heard footſteps, and preſently after the well known tap of Thomaſine. She opened the door of her cell; but the joy that gleamed in her countenance was ſuddenly removed by the appearance of another perſon, in the Nun's habit it is true, but of ſo tall and maſculine an appearance, that Agnes involuntarily ſhuddered as the light ſhe bore fell ſtrongly on her face, and diſcloſed ſtrong and harſh features, forming a countenance alarming and repulſive. Thomaſine in a moment obſerved the fear that agitated the trembling Agnes, and taking her hand, endeavoured to re-aſſure her by telling her that ſhe had perſuaded Siſter Beatrice to become their friend, and to aſſiſt their project; for that as ſhe was portreſs, it would be difficult to effect an eſcape without her connivance.

" Yes, yes," cried Beatrice, in a tone that made the very heart of Agnes recoil,

" I am

"I am willing enough to be your friend; but come, put the child on the garment you have brought."

They now unfolded a packet, which Agnes had not before obferved, and drew from it a complete Nun's habit, which they defired her to throw on over her common drefs, that they might more eafily elude fufpicion; and then, Beatrice feizing an arm of the reluctant Agnes, with flow and cautious fteps they ventured forth, Sifter Thomafine concealing, as well as fhe could, the light fhe carried. They moved onward with light fteps until Thomafine ftopping, entreated Beatrice to go foremoft with the light, as fhe began to be doubtful of the way. Beatrice, on this, relinquifhed the arm of Agnes, who gladly accepted the fupport Sifter Thomafine offered her. They went along feveral intricate paffages, till at laft they came to a flight of fteps, which they were to defcend, and which ended in a long, low paffage, clofed at the further extremity by an iron door. Beatrice

produced

produced the key of this door, and after crossing two dungeons, they came into a spacious vault, which Beatrice said was the cemetery of the Convent. Here, fatigued and faint, Agnes seemed unable to move further, but for a long time she resisted all Thomasine's entreaties to repose for awhile; at length, however, imagining that the old Nun might stand in need of that rest she so strenuously recommended, she seated herself on a low tombstone, and Thomasine and Beatrice following her example, the latter produced a small bottle, of the contents of which she invited her companions to partake; but to invite was in vain, though Beatrice praised its invigorating powers in a copious strain of eloquence. But when, at length, Thomasine and Agnes prepared to move forwards, they found Beatrice too well pleased with her new friend to wish so soon to forsake its company. Agnes trembled; she expected every moment to hear the chapel bell ring for the midnight service, while it was yet impossible to persuade

Beatrice to move. To argument ſhe was deaf, to petition inſenſible, and Agnes wrung her hands in agony. At length, as if ſome unknown cauſe had recalled her loſt ſenſes, ſhe ſtarted up, exclaiming—"Holy Maria, we ſhall preſently hear the midnight bell! —Come, Thomaſine, Agnes, why do you loiter?"

Joyfully they obeyed the ſignal, and croſſed the cemetery to a door oppoſite to that by which they entered; but when they applied the key to it, it refuſed to yield. After many fruitleſs endeavours, Beatrice curſed her own folly for not remembering at firſt that the ſame key would not open both doors. Agnes ſhuddered; to fetch the key, and effect her concealment before the midnight ſervice, would now be utterly impoſſible; for her to return was highly dangerous, yet to remain alone in that abode of the dead was dreadfully appalling: there was, however, no alternative. Beatrice and Thomaſine muſt both return, for their abſence would be obſerved; and it was certainly

certainly very hazardous for her to pass again through those passages, where now she was liable to meet the Sisters in their way to the chapel. In this horrible place then she was doomed to stay until the midnight service should be ended, when Beatrice and Thomasine both assured her they would return with all possible haste, and at length induced her to consent.

A new difficulty now arose; they had but one light; and to retrace the various windings of the passages without one was impossible: yet to remain in that gloomy receptacle of the departed Sisters without light, seemed also impossible. There was, however, no time for deliberation; already a soft chime gave the accustomed prelude to the midnight summons, and Beatrice, advising Agnes not to be childish, rose to depart, carrying with her the light;—but Thomasine, who tenderly pitied the situation in which Agnes was to be left, fortunately espied on the ground a fragment of a torch, which

which had probably been dropped there by an attendant on ſome of the funerals.

Thus provided againſt the unutterable horrors of darkneſs in ſuch an abode as that, Agnes beheld their departure with ſome degree of tranquillity, and flattered herſelf her compoſure would not fail during the neceſſary period of their abſence, and for awhile her courage did not deſert her; though when ſhe glanced her eye cautiouſly over the ſhadowy obſcurity of the ſpacious vault, airy and indefinable figures ſeemed to glide athwart it, while ſhe dared not gaze long enough either to give to theſe children of her imagination any determinate form, or to aſcertain that their exiſtence was merely ideal. Preſently, however, the chapel bell rung; and as the gloomy cave ſhe was now a priſoner in was immediately underneath the chapel, ſhe heard the advancing ſteps of the Nuns, and the firſt low note ſound from the organ. Emboſomed in the grave, Agnes joined with fervour in the devotions; the pealing anthem came

ſoftened

ſoftened to her ear, and lifted her ſoul above the remembrance of her preſent horrid ſituation; ſhe followed every part of the ſervice, and felt invigorated and harmonized by the healing power of devotion.

"Oh Heaven!" ſaid ſhe to herſelf, "my prayers then are as acceptable to thee from the depths of this horrid abode of death, as thoſe which reach thy ear from conſecrated chapels, and reſounding aiſles!"

She heard the cloſing anthem in which the ſweet voice of Felicia uſed formerly to be diſtinguiſhed, and ſhe ſhed many a melancholy tear to the memory of her aunt. There was no diſtinction in the graves of the Siſters—no memorial to point out where this or that frail body mingled with its parent duſt; a little hillock of earth marked the ſpot where every departed inhabitant of the Convent was laid, but the mouldering memorials were no way diſtinguiſhed from each other. Agnes, therefore, could not obtain the mournful ſatisfaction of bedewing the grave of Felicia with

her tears; but ſhe wept as ſhe reſted on the low tombſtone, which had been erected in honour of the laſt Lady Abbeſs.

The midnight ſervice was now over, but Thomaſine and Beatrice came not. For a while Agnes conſoled herſelf with the thought that they could not ſet out immediately, leſt they ſhould excite ſuſpicion; but at length this reflection would conſole her no longer, and ſhe began to fear that ſhe was doomed to periſh in this horrible receſs. Every moment that paſſed, took from Agnes ſome part of the compoſure her religious duties had beſtowed, and a thouſand alarming fancies flitted before her mind. Trembling in agony, burning tears fell from her eyes; ſhe ruminated on the terrible preſent, on the more dreadful future. She remembered a gloomy chamber which ſhe had obſerved in her way hither, and which Beatrice had told her was the chamber of puniſhment for thoſe who offended againſt the laws of the Convent. The laſt delinquent, ſhe added, had periſhed there;

ſhe

ſhe had violated her vow of chaſtity, and in that dreadful chamber, bereft of all comfort, of all ſociety, even of light, ſhe had dragged on the tedious months, till her hour of miſery came; when, alone, unaſſiſted, uncheered by the voice of friendſhip, or the ſoothings of pity, ſhe had given birth to a daughter. The infant ſoon died; but the wretched mother lived long enough to be found by her jailers preſſing the cold lips of the babe to her milkleſs boſom; and, ſhewing them that ſhe wanted the common food given by Nature for the ſupport of helpleſs infancy, beſought them to cheriſh her child, and forgot her ſorrows in the arms of Death. Their bodies, Beatrice added, had been left in the ſtone chamber to moulder away, in juſt memorial of the crime of the mother, and their bones yet remained ſcattered on the floor.

Agnes pictured to herſelf the ſituation of the wretched mother in the hour of child-birth, and thought, that were her attempt to eſcape, diſcovered, that chamber might

be

be also her death-bed.—Still Thomasine and Beatrice came not; and while Agnes wondered and lamented that they thus left her cheerless in that dreadful abode, her torch suddenly expired, and she was left in utter darkness. This circumstance doubled all her agonies, and to her bewildered imagination it seemed to approach to the morning hours, when the great clock of the chapel struck a half hour; by the chime that succeeded, she understood that it was half past one, and wondered to remark how time lingered with the unhappy and the fearful. At length she thought she heard the sound of footsteps advancing along the passage; her heart palpitated. Suppose Thomasine and Beatrice had been delayed by the admission of some emissaries from the Prince into the Convent, and that it should be some horrid ruffians coming to seize her in this receptacle of the dead! This idea grew so strong upon her, that she involuntarily sought to conceal herself; but she knew not where

where to hide her wretched head, and awaited in mute agony the unclosing of the door. At length she heard the key turned in the lock; she gazed eagerly; it creaked upon its hinges; a ray of light streamed across the vault, and she beheld once more the faces of Thomasine and Beatrice.

Thomasine flew to her, and held her in a warm embrace, but Beatrice reminded them that they had no time to lose, in a voice that appalled the fainting spirits of the exhausted Agnes, who started from the arms of Thomasine, and prepared to follow her conductress, who now applied a key to the opposite door, which yielded, and Agnes, supported by her venerable friend, followed through other similar passages to a spiral staircase, where Beatrice stopped.

"We need attend you no further," said she; "you have only to follow these stairs; they will conduct you to the chamber prepared for you, where you will find refreshment, and a bed.—Adieu, daughter! be ready to-morrow to obey the first signal."

 Thomasine

Thomafine feemed unwilling to leave Agnes at fuch a moment; but Beatrice had already put a lamp into the hand of Agnes, and had proceeded many fteps on her return; fhe was therefore obliged to give her a hafty embrace, and followed the fteps of Beatrice.

Agnes placed her lamp on the fteps, and watched them as they quickly retired from her, with a feeling little fhort of agony. She followed them with her eye for many minutes along the narrow paffage which led to the fpiral ftaircafe, and when, at length, they turned a corner, and fhe faw them no more, fhe leaned againft the wall, and wept bitterly. Roufing herfelf, however, from a dejection more to be attributed to foregone circumftances, than to the alarm of the prefent moment, fhe took up her lamp, and began to afcend the ftairs. They were narrow and winding, and feemed endlefs. Faint and fatigued, fhe fat herfelf down to reft; but the dim light of her lamp, and the oppreffion fhe felt ftealing over her,

warned

warned her not to rest in a place rendered unwholesome by long confined air. The steps grew narrower, steeper, and more rugged as she advanced, and a fresh air, that blew reviving on her face, seemed to come from some loop-hole that opened to the pure breath of Heaven.

Revived by a breeze so welcome, Agnes proceeded invigorated. She clambered with difficulty up stairs broken in parts, and so narrow, that they scarcely afforded footing for her tread, and she began to wonder whether she could have mistaken her way; but she remembered no turning that could possibly have deceived her, when she suddenly observed a door on the left hand. She endeavoured to open it, but it resisted all her efforts, and she determined at least to proceed to the end of the stairs, and see to what they led, and if she found not the promised chamber, with the refreshments and the bed, to return hither, and try once more at that door. With increased difficulty, however, she proceeded,

and could not help wondering how Beatrice or Thomaſine had ever been able to reach the ſummit, ſince to her youthful form it was attended with ſo much labour. At length a gleam of daylight ſtole down the ſtairs, and Agnes found herſelf near the end of her toils. Up the few remaining ſteps ſhe now bounded with the agility of a fawn, and found herſelf in a circular chamber, enlightened by the tender beams of morning, and commanding a vaſt extent of country. She found here a table covered with ſome coarſe refreſhments, and a mattreſs ſpread on the floor. At this preſent end to her ſufferings, her heart expanded with gratitude, and ſhe gazed on the fair face of Nature, ſo ſweetly open to her view, glittering with dew-drops, and enveloped in that tender haze that accompanies the opening dawn, with ſenſations amounting to rapture. She knelt down, and offered up her impaſſioned thanks to Heaven for her comparative ſecurity, and then refreſhed her weary frame with ſome of the viands provided for her.

Never

Never tired of gazing on the beautiful ſcene before her, ſhe watched with enthuſiaſm the gradual advance of day, the crimſon eaſt every moment glowing more brightly with a quivering and yet uncertain light; the light clouds of a delicate roſe-colour, embelliſhing the grey concave of Heaven; the laſt faint twinkle of the departing ſtars; the glittering of the ſtreams as they caught the increaſing radiance of the eaſtern ſky; the diſtant mountain tops gleaming with the firſt beams of the ſun ere he had riſen above the horizon; the animated, yet gentle carol of the lark, impatient to hail the day; till at length the ſplendid orb of day, enveloped by a ſoft miſt, began to peep above the boundary of ſight; as he ſlowly aſcended, the miſts rolled away, and his full brightneſs illuminated the extenſive ſcene.

Agnes gazed with rapture, and forgot for a moment the ſorrows ſhe had undergone, and thoſe ſhe had ſtill to fear.

" Alas!" ſaid ſhe, at length, " will my

proſpects in life ever be glowing and unclouded like this now before me? Will an extenſive field of delight and happineſs ever thus ſpread boundleſs to my view?—Alas! alas! how many heavy clouds yet obſcure the future from my ſight! Oh Sigiſmond! ſhall we ever meet again?"

She continued loſt in this reverie for ſome time, until fatigue overpowered reflection, and ſhe threw herſelf on the mattreſs to obtain a tranſient repoſe.

When ſhe awoke, the ſun was high, and ſhe felt refreſhed and compoſed. A door, oppoſite to that by which ſhe had entered the turret chamber, now caught her attention; ſhe went to it, and it readily yielded to her touch: it opened upon a paſſage narrow and winding, and which, from its appearance, ſurrounded the dome of the chapel; and when, after purſuing it ſome way, ſhe came to a window, which gave her a full view into the chapel, ſhe was confirmed in her conjecture. While ſhe yet gazed, ſhe perceived the Nuns entering, and

determined

determined to remain where ſhe was during the enſuing ſervice. The organ ſounded; never had its ſolemn tones ſtruck ſo delightfully on the heart of Agnes as now, when ſtanding on the outſide of the dome, it reverberated around the arch, and came ſoftened to her ear; it was like the ſounds an ardent fancy may imagine to be ſometimes wafted to ſome muſing eremite, or raptured ſaint, from celeſtial harps, to give his ſoul a foretaſte of the delights of Heaven.

Loſt in the feelings of the moment, Agnes advanced, in her flowing black garment, full in ſight of the chapel; but ſcarcely had ſhe committed her indiſcretion, ere ſhe repented it; ſhe drew back, and ſilently, and remote from obſervation, joined in the devotions, and afterwards returned to her turret. She had now an opportunity of witneſſing the gradual advance of the evening ſhadows, and ſhe ſeated herſelf by the window, to mark how the light firſt became, almoſt imperceptibly, ſoftened by a thin

haze that ſeemed juſt to ſhadow the brilliancy of ether; the rich golden gleam that burniſhed the trunks of the trees, and ſhed a glowing luſtre over their foliage, ſhe watched with penſive and indeſcribable pleaſure, when ſuddenly the ſound of footſteps along the circular paſſage alarmed her. To eſcape down the rugged and almoſt impaſſable ſtairs was impoſſible, for the footſteps were very near; and Agnes haſtily called up all her fortitude to await the coming danger with dignity and calmneſs. She heard the lock of the door moved; ſhe looked up, and beheld Thomaſine.

"Haſten, my devoted child! follow me in ſilence!" cried the good old Nun, with a wild and haggard countenance.

Agnes took up her little packet, and followed the haſty ſteps of her conductreſs. In vain ſhe attempted to aſk an explanation; Thomaſine had neither breath nor ſpirits to enter upon it, and they proceeded in ſilence to another ſtaircaſe, in better repair than that by which Agnes had aſcended.

With a ſpeed that mocked all fatigue, Thomaſine led the way; they deſcended many ſtairs, and were, after paſſing through ſeveral intricate paſſages, and deſcending more ſtairs, once more in the ſubterraneous vaults of the Convent.

"Oh ſpeak!" cried Agnes, half wild with agitation; "tell me why this haſte!"

"Alas, my child!" replied the venerable Nun, "I have ſcarcely power to tell you that Beatrice was treacherous; ſhe was in league with your enemies without, and had decoyed you to the turret to put you into their hands without involving the Lady Abbeſs."

"And how," exclaimed Agnes, "came you to diſcover this?"

"The pangs of conſcience," replied Thomaſine, "have perſuaded Beatrice that ſhe ſaw your ghoſt during the prayers; her agitation was extreme, and the moment the ſervice was over, ſhe ſought me, and confeſſed to me the cruel plot ſhe had engaged in, and by giving me the keys, enabled me

to attempt your inſtant reſcue. This night, ſweet Agnes, was to have delivered you into the hands of thoſe men who can ſurely demand you for no good purpoſe."

"Oh generous Thomaſine!" cried Agnes, "what ſhall ever repay you for this goodneſs? It was, however, myſelf whom Beatrice ſaw; for I had diſcovered the circular paſſage, and, wrapped in admiration at the lofty ſtrains of the organ, appeared for a moment before the window."

"I ſhall not undeceive Beatrice," reſumed Thomaſine, "ſince her repentant terror has produced ſo good an effect. But let us not loiter; in a few hours your father's emiſſaries will find theſe mazes, and there is no other poſſible way by which you can effect your eſcape."

Agnes followed the worthy Nun, and at length they entered on a long narrow paſſage, ſo low that they could ſcarcely ſtand upright, yet evidently aſcending.

"This paſſage," ſaid Thomaſine, "opens on the woods, and when there, Agnes, may

may Heaven guide you to a place of ſafety!"

"Oh my friend!" replied Agnes, "may you return in ſafety to your cell, and may your generous kindneſs ever remain undiſcovered!"

"Think not of me, my child," ſaid the excellent Nun, "I am old; and if by any diſcovery, which Beatrice will at any time have it in her power to make, my life ſhould be at all ſhortened, I ſhall loſe but a few years of infirmity and uſeleſſneſs, and my laſt moments will be made happy by the hope of having ſaved you.—Oh, could but that hope be certainty!"

Agnes ſighed to think that it was impoſſible to give intelligence to any one within thoſe walls of any thing paſſing without, and equally impoſſible to receive any intelligence from within. Cut off from the world, and all communication with it, thoſe religious had the beſt chance of peace in their ſecluſion, who could entirely exclude from their hearts all worldly attachments, all feelings of humanity.

Such had never been Thomasine's case; ever alive to the impulse of compassion, she had felt for all those who had entered those walls, and for Agnes she felt an interest which would end but with her life. Agnes embraced her kind conductress, and, struck by her last words, would have returned to her confinement, and submitted to all the unknown horrors of her fate; but Thomasine overruled, and they proceeded as fast as the straitness of the place would allow them, along this rising passage, till at length they found themselves at the door which opened into the woods. Thomasine applied the key; the lock easily gave way, and the breath of Heaven and liberty once more saluted their faces.

Agnes now held her benefactress in a farewel embrace, and then, fearful of prolonging the moments, lest her repeated adieus should involve the kind-hearted Thomasine in trouble, she moved a few steps

ſteps forward, and heard that gate reclosed behind her, which threw her now, forlorn and ſolitary, on the world.

For the firſt few moments the ſenſation of liberty was all that ſtruck her; a throb of joy beat tumultuouſly at her heart, and ſhe exulted in her eſcape; but very ſoon the painful conſciouſneſs of her undefended, her perilous ſituation forced itſelf upon her mind, and ſhe no longer dared to rejoice in her freedom. To return, however, was now impoſſible; that door was for ever barred upon her, which to ſee unbarred, was a few moments before the ſummit of her wiſhes. Whither was ſhe now to go? The night was rapidly advancing, and the emiſſaries of the Prince would ſoon ſurround the Convent. To find Colano, to ſeek Father Buonafede, was all her wiſh, though convinced that with him ſhe ſhould immediately be ſought when her flight was diſcovered; yet to profit by his counſel, to be placed by him in ſome ſafe aſylum, was all that offered a proſpect of repoſe to her

her troubled mind. Yet how to find Colano? for ſhe knew not even on which ſide of the Convent ſhe had emerged, and ſhe might be loſt in the intricacies of the foreſt. To remain where ſhe was, ſhe knew, however, to be impoſſible; and uttering a fervent prayer to the Protector of the innocent, ſhe haſtily moved forward, and was ſoon out of ſight of the Convent.

CHAP.

## CHAP. VII.

" No ſilver-ſounding voice,
" Melodious, warbles to my ſorrowing ſoul;
" The ſooty raven ſails around my head,
" And harſhly chants her hoarſeſt deſcant here!"

SAYER.

PERPLEXED and alarmed, and but ill guided through the mazes of the wood by the faſt-fading glow of the weſtern horizon, Agnes advanced with an unequal pace, and frequently ſtopped to gaze as far as the tangling branches of the trees would allow her, and to liſten if no ſound of footſteps were borne to her ear on the breeze that ſighed at intervals among the leaves. No object, however, met her eye; no ſound caught her ear; nor could ſhe find any means of learning

learning whether ſhe was plunging more deeply into the woods, or whether ſhe was advancing towards the open country. She heard the chimes of the Convent ſounding gradually more and more diſtant, but no noiſe of purſuit mingled with the tone of the bells, which came ſoftened through the trees; nor could ſhe judge at all whether ſhe was following the proper road.

At length, however, ſhe became painfully convinced ſhe was wrong; the road ſhe had choſen began to grow narrower, and after ſhe had proceeded a little further, ſcarcely a track was diſcernible; and the trees now ſtood ſo thick, that even her ſlender figure could ſcarcely glide between them. Obliged to return, ſhe retraced her ſteps with extreme reluctance; and as the chimes now ſounded louder as ſhe advanced, ſhe dreaded approaching ſo near to the Convent, as to be diſcovered by her father's emiſſaries. At length ſhe diſcovered a road which ſuddenly ſtruck off to the right,

and

and ſhe haſtily followed it, rejoicing as ſhe again moved from the Convent.

After purſuing this track for ſome time, the trees became gradually thinner, and ſhe beheld the diſtant horizon now faintly illuminated by the riſing moon. This circumſtance led her to hope that ſhe ſhould not be again bewildered in the foreſt, and, animated with new life, ſhe preſſed more ſpeedily forward, and ſoon found herſelf advancing towards the ſkirts of the wood.

At length a natural viſta opened on the champaign country; the moon, now at the full, immediately fronted the end of the viſta, and threw a brilliant radiance over a majeſtic river that flowed through the plain. The diſtance was bounded by gently ſwelling hills, and the near ground was beautifully diverſified by a thouſand various trees, ſcattered about without art or deſign, and embelliſhed by many a ſhepherd's hut, which, low and white, preſented a ſtrong idea of comfort.

Charmed with the beauteous ſcene before

her,

her, and eagerly bending all her wishes to obtain a lodging for the night in one of those shepherd's huts, Agnes forgot for a moment that the moon fell in full brilliancy on her white garment, (for she had relinquished the Nun's habit), and exposed her to the observation of any travellers. When this remembrance occurred to her, it was only to point out the danger of her situation, without enabling her to find a remedy; and she proceeded up the vista, which happily was not a long one, with much alarm and apprehension. At length she suddenly emerged upon the open country; and while she gazed for a moment on a scene of such varied beauty, so sweetly enlightened by the enchanting moonlight, she was surrounded by a party of men on horseback, who, after viewing her for an instant, exclaimed—"This must be her of whom we are in search!"

Overpowered with terror, she instantly fainted, and without further enquiry was placed

placed before one of the men, and carried off with ſurpriſing ſwiftneſs.

Theſe men, who had remarked her advancing along the wood walk, had concealed themſelves amongſt the ſcattered clumps of trees on the ſkirts of the foreſt, that they might ſurpriſe her more ſpeedily; as they could not doubt that in the fair fugitive, whoſe alarm was ſufficiently viſible, they beheld Agnes St. Clair, the object of their purſuit.

The chill breeze of evening at length recalled her ſenſes, and ſhe recovered to the dreadful conſciouſneſs of her ſituation. The perſon before whom ſhe was placed, treated her with extreme civility and kindneſs, and ſeemed as much as poſſible to conſult her eaſe and ſafety. When he found ſhe had recovered her ſenſes, he addreſſed her in tones of gentleneſs and politeneſs, aſſuring her ſhe had nothing to fear; that ſhe was with thoſe who knew the worth, and did homage to the charms of the Lady St. Clair.

Poor

Poor Agnes, though ſhe ſhuddered to find herſelf known beyond all concealment, yet felt relieved by the politeneſs of her companion, and ſtrove to repreſs the ſorrow and alarm that throbbed wildly in her boſom. As they advanced, they perceived a hamlet, and the conductor of Agnes called to his party to go forward, and procure accommodations for the night. The night was ſo beautiful that it would have appeared leſs formidable to Agnes to purſue her journey during its continuance, than to repoſe in the village; but a faint hope aroſe in her mind that it might be poſſible to intereſt the people of the houſe to aſſiſt her in eſcaping, or concealing herſelf;—yet when ſhe recollected her ſituation, far diſtant from Colano, and from every human being ſhe had ever known, ſhe ſcarcely knew in what reſpect eſcape or concealment would be deſirable. She forbore, however, to ſpeak, and alighted in ſilence at a neat cottage, where rooms had been procured for Agnes, her conductor, and one of

the

the attendants; the others were to be dif-perfed about in different houfes, and were ordered to affemble at a very early hour.

The cavalier, who evidently appeared the leader of the party, attended Agnes to a parlour, where refrefhments were prepared, and with a graceful and earneft politenefs, befought her to partake of them.

Agnes replied only with tears, and the cavalier, with much fympathy, endeavoured to confole and re-affure her. He entreated her to be comforted, and tried to convince her that her apprehenfions and forrow were unfounded.

Relieved, at leaft, from any immediate perfonal alarms, Agnes could not forbear paying fome attention to the endeavours of her companion, who joined all the charms of manly beauty of face, to perfect fymmetry of form, and perfect elegance of manners. Oppreffed as her bofom was, fhe could not but allow that fhe was in the care of a man very little calculated to alarm her; and though fhe felt moft forcibly the impropriety

of

of her ſituation, in travelling with men only, and ſo young a one for her chief companion, yet the delicate reſpectfulneſs of his manners ſerved as much as poſſible to quiet her apprehenſions on this ſubject. When he had at length prevailed on her to take ſome refreſhment, he called for the women of the houſe to attend her to her chamber; and politely, yet warmly, wiſhing her good repoſe, left her to the care of a good-humoured country girl. This girl, however, ſpoke in a dialect Agnes could not well underſtand; ſhe therefore deſpaired of obtaining any relief, and when, at length, with infinite difficulty, ſhe made her comprehend that ſhe was being carried away againſt her will, and that ſhe would for ever gratefully remember her, and reward her to the utmoſt of her power, if ſhe would aſſiſt her to eſcape, the girl merely anſwered that they knew well enough ſhe was carried away againſt her will, but that they never interfered between man and wife.

Impenetrable to perſuaſion, Agnes was at length obliged to diſmiſs the girl, and ſecuring her room, paſſed ſome time in vain endeavours to forget for a moment her ſituation in ſleep; but ſleep refuſed to ſhed the balm of oblivion over her aching head, and the morning found her unrefreſhed, pale, haggard, and ſtill in tears. Her conductor gently reproached her for the manner in which ſhe had too evidently paſſed the night, and ſoftly preſſing the hand by which he led her to the parlour, beſought her to be comforted, aſſuring her that no harm was intended her, that ſhe was going to enjoy rank, diſtinction, and every luxury that affiuence could beſtow, and all the homage of the heart.

Poor Agnes, to whom the homage of her Sigiſmond's heart was all that was deſirable, and who longed for nothing ſo much as to be enabled to receive that homage in peace and privacy, now gained ſo much courage as to aſk of her companion whither

whither ſhe was being carried to enjoy theſe boaſted advantages.

"Nothing in the world, Lady Agnes," replied the Signor, "would give me ſo much pleaſure as to comply with your requeſts, and to inform you without heſitation whither I am to have the honour of conducting you. An oath to the friend who charged me with this commiſſion, reſtrains me—a commiſſion by which my feelings and my heart are ſo highly gratified that I would not willingly do any thing to forfeit that confidence which has inveſted me with it."

"Alas!" ſaid Agnes, "how ſtrangely then are your heart and feelings capable of receiving gratification, if it can be afforded by the act of dragging an inoffenſive female from the ſhelter ſhe had ſought, and carrying her, notwithſtanding her reluctance, to ſcenes where ſhe is unknown, and which ſhe ſhudders to behold?"

"Pardon me," replied the cavalier; "the Lady Agnes needs not ſhudder at the

the ſcence ſhe is going to; ſhe will there meet friends, affectionate ones, admirers, protectors; and it is to heighten the happineſs ſhe will there enjoy, that this ſilence is obſerved. Nor let her think ill of her too fortunate companion, if he rejoices in having obtained an office by which he is permitted the firſt perſonaliy to know the Lady Agnes, and by every care of which he is capable, to ſtrive to leſſen the reluctance with which ſhe performs this journey."

The horſes were now ready, and Agnes ſuffered herſelf to be again placed unreſiſtingly before her companion, and they proceeded on their journey. His converſation, mild, elegant, and reſpectful, every moment leſſened the alarms of Agnes, and ſhe determined to make another effort to obtain from him the ſecret of her deſtination. Not, however, while ſurrounded by obſervers would ſhe riſk this attempt; but endeavoured to withdraw her attention from the painful circumſtances in her ſituation, to

to the beauty and variety of the ſcenes through which ſhe was paſſing.

Agnes, who had never ſtrayed further from Salviati and Colano than her own feet would carry her, ſupported by the protecting arm of her Sigiſmond, would, in any other circumſtances, have been delighted with the country which this journey preſented to her view, but vain is the power of all outward objects to ſooth and harmonize that heart which ſorrow and uncertainty internally haraſs; vain are the beauties of Nature to ſoften the preſſure of grief; vain every attention, ſave from the voice of love, to lighten the anguiſh of ſuſpenſe. Agnes owed, however, to her ſituation, that ſhe paſſed without apprehenſion over enormous crags, which oftentimes ſcarcely afforded footing for the horſes, and down whoſe rugged and perpendicular ſides the leaſt falſe ſtep would have daſhed them a tremendous depth; but ſhe alſo owed to it that ſhe viewed without rapture the contraſt of thoſe barren

yet

yet magnificent rocks, to the ſunſhine landſcapes that ſpread far away beyond, gay with glittering waters, and adorned with buildings and woods. To the deep ſenſe of woe that rankled in her boſom, ſhe owed her unconcern at the violent heat that oppreſſed them on a large plain where no ſhelter could be found, as well as to the evident ſolicitude of her companion to leſſen to her the inconveniences of the weather. At length a little ſhade offered itſelf, under the ſhelter of ſome majeſtic plane-trees, where the cavalier propoſed to her to alight, and repoſe during the continuance of the intenſe heat.

Paſſive and reſigned, Agnes was lifted gently from her ſeat by the attentive Signor, and ſome of the attendants ſpread proviſions which had been brought from the village. They then retired to a reſpectful diſtance, and when the cavalier had eaten, and vainly endeavoured to prevail on Agnes alſo to eat, he reſigned the food to the reſt of the train, who readily accepted it. While the

attendants were thus employed, the Signor endeavoured to engage his lovely companion in converſation, and ſaw, with a regret he could not repreſs, that her eyes were frequently ſuffuſed with tears, and that deep and convulſive ſighs often heaved her boſom.

"Whence, faireſt Agnes," ſaid her conductor, "whence this renewed uneaſineſs? Why theſe returning tears—this anxiety irrepreſſible?"

"Alas, Signor!" replied Agnes, "if exhauſted nature has for a while denied me the relief of tears, I have not the leſs acutely felt that I am a fugitive I know not whither, and I know not with whom—that I am torn from the only ſpot where the few friends I have on earth knew where to ſeek me—that I am going, defenceleſs, unprotected, to ——"

Her voice faltered, and the Signor replied with warmth—"Not defenceleſs, not unprotected, lovelieſt lady, are you going; and, Oh! that I dared to tell you

you whither I am conducting you! But of this be aſſured, that in all ſituations, and upon all occaſions, you may ever command the arm, the power of the man whom this gentle ſorrow ſo deeply intereſts.—Believe me, Lady Agnes, I wiſh I could, conſiſtently with my honour, reveal to you the whole of what you wiſh to know; I wiſh I could even tell you more of myſelf than that I am, and ſhall be through life your moſt ſincere adorer!"

From a declaration ſo unequivocal, Agnes turned, ſickening, away; her heart, inviolably and tenderly attached to her Sigiſmond, ſhrunk from the thought of another lover. She was, as ſhe believed, on the road to a man who called himſelf her father. The cavalier, to whom he had entruſted the charge of her, was undoubtedly his particular friend; and what perſecutions did ſhe not now foreſee! How was ſhe now to purſue the plan ſhe had formed, of making this man, who ſeemed gentle and generous, her friend, of engaging his intereſt and pro-

tection in whatever ſcenes ſhe might hereafter be engaged?

The cavalier ſeemed to wait her reply, and finding her ſilent, ſaid again—"Will not the Lady Agnes confide in a heart ſo wholly devoted to her — a heart where never yet another miſtreſs, ſave Honour, has had the ſmalleſt influence?—Oh faireſt! you might induce me to violate the confidence of my friend, to relate to you all I know; for one heavenly, one enchanting ſmile from you would far overpay the perfidy I ſhould be guilty of!—Speak, gentle Agnes, will you wholly and for ever bind me to your ſervice?"

There was an air of preſumption in this ſpeech which made Agnes tremble. She aſſumed all the dignity ſhe could command, and ſaid—"On no account, Signor, would I induce any one to violate an oath; and for the ſervices you proffer me——"

"Oh, accept them!" ſaid her companion, with vehemence; "indeed I may be uſeful to you."

"No,

" No, Signor," resumed Agnes, " it is impossible I should accept them; the only favour you now can do me, is to speak on this subject no more."

" Sweetest Lady," interposed her ardent conductor, " are you in earnest? Can you really forbid me to tell you that I adore you?"

" Most seriously," replied Agnes; " think, Signor, of my peculiar situation, and you will see that I am justified in my prohibition."

" But you do not, you cannot mean to deprive me of hope?—Ah, loveliest Agnes! I will be silent during this journey; but suffer me, at least, to hope that this obedience will procure me some interest in your heart."

" I cannot allow you to deceive yourself," replied Agnes; " it never will!"

The refusals of Agnes were gentle, because she feared to irritate a man in whose power she was so completely. She meant them to be steady, and to deprive him of

hope; but the presumptuous cavalier, more struck by their mildness than their firmness, replied with respect—" At least I will cease now to importune you, and trust to the influence of my conduct towards you, to awaken some sentiment of tenderness in that lovely bosom."

Agnes was alike unwilling to prolong a conversation so painful, or to suffer it to end with so false an expectation; she strove, therefore, by one great effort, to collect all her firmness, and addressed her companion.

" Alas, Signor! add not to the distresses you are condemned to impose on me, the painful consciousness that you are cherishing an unfounded hope; never can you command the heart of Agnes; her gratitude you may, by forbearing for ever to speak again of these sentiments."

" Alas, loveliest Agnes! and of what avail will be to me," replied the Signor, " this cold sentiment of gratitude—to me whose bosom is agitated with the most violent love?"

" It

" It is, however, all I have to offer," ſaid Agnes, trembling. " But, Signor, the violence of the heat is over; had we not better proceed?"

" Yes, yes, proceed by all means," ſaid the cavalier. " The time may come, ſweet object of my tendereſt paſſion, when you may rue this coldneſs, and wiſh you had ſecured the friendſhip you thus lightly reject."

" I do not reject your friendſhip," replied Agnes, alarmed; " Heaven is my witneſs, I wiſh nothing more than to intereſt your friendſhip."

" Nothing more than my friendſhip?" repeated the Signor; " deluſive, deceitful words! under the ſhew of kindneſs to forbid my beſt hopes, my warmeſt wiſhes!—Come, Lady, we will proceed."

With a heart oppreſſed by a conſciouſneſs of new misfortunes, Agnes again was placed on the horſe, and they journied forward in ſilence. Her tears now flowed unceaſingly; ſhe made no effort to reſtrain them,

them, and her companion gave no attention to them. Abſorbed in his own reflections, he ſuffered her to weep unchecked, and they proceeded for many miles in gloomy ſilence. At the approach of evening, as they again drew near a village, he ſent forward the attendants, as before; but no accommodations could be procured, and they proceeded on their way.

To Agnes all was indifferent; ſhe felt that ſhe was going to a parent to whom her only known parent had trembled to conſign her. Conducted to him by ſuch a man as her preſent companion, there was little doubt but ſhe was intended as the reward of his trouble; and that ſhe ſhould ever be able to intereſt her father in favour of Sigiſmond, ſhe dared not flatter herſelf, though ſhe knew, or had reaſon to believe, that Sigiſmond was in the power of the man whom ſhe concluded claimed her as her father. But from the various accounts ſhe had heard, ſhe knew not which to depend upon as truth; nor could ſhe at all gueſs whether

whether ſhe was likely to be going to the ſame place that contained the object of her tendereſt affection; or if ſhe were, whether ſhe would ever be able to ſee him.

Abſorbed in reflections ſo haraſſing to her ſpirits, Agnes heeded not the gradual decline of day, nor the pale moon riſing ſolemn in the eaſt, ſurrounded by a few light clouds, which floated round her, and from her beams received an almoſt equal brilliancy;—ſhe heeded not that the ſilver radiance trembled on the boſom of the waters, and tipped, with mild, enchanting luſtre, all the various objects around her; nor was ſhe ſtruck with the change, when they ſuddenly plunged into a thick wood, whoſe interwoven branches allowed not the pale light to penetrate. At intervals, indeed, the gleams of moonlight broke through the thinner parts of the foliage, and chequered the path; but inſtantly again were excluded by the cluſtering leaves, and they journied on in darkneſs and ſilence.

The ſilence was at length interrupted by

the companion of Agnes, who, calling to one of the attendants, bade him go forward, and examine that building which he perceived among the trees; and if he could procure there accommodations for the night, to come back, and conduct them thither.

"You muſt be cruelly fatigued, Lady," ſaid he then to Agnes; "and, heedleſs as you are of my ſufferings, I would not be inattentive to your comforts."

Agnes made an effort to thank him, and the faltering tone of her voice ſeemed to penetrate the ſoul of the cavalier; for he paſſed his arms round her waiſt, and preſſing her tenderly to him, ſaid earneſtly—"Bewitching girl, why ſo tender, and yet ſo ſevere?"

"Spare me, Signor!" ſaid Agnes, in rather a firmer tone.

"Pardon me, Lady," replied he, withdrawing his arm; "yet, Oh that you would allow me in future to hope!"

The man now came up, with an account that the building was merely the ruin of a caſtle,

caſtle, and ſeemed unable to afford even ſhelter; accommodation there could be none, and no inhabitants.

"We muſt proceed then, Ugo," ſaid the cavalier. "Fair Agnes, can you ſupport this accumulated fatigue?"

"I can ſupport every thing that is neceſſary, Signor," ſaid Agnes; "do not you add unneceſſary troubles."

"Have I your pardon for the paſt?" ſaid he, earneſtly,

"To what purpoſe ſhould I withhold, or grant it?" ſaid Agnes, "ſince——"

"Oh! ſay no more, lovely Agnes!" interrupted he; "I will offend no more."

They had not proceeded far, when a few faint flaſhes of lightning darted through the trees, and diſtant thunder rumbled in the air. The cavalier propoſed returning to the ruined caſtle, to try what ſhelter it would afford them from the ſtorm, to which he did not wiſh to expoſe Agnes in the midſt of the wood;—they accordingly turned about, and ſoon regained the ſpot; when alighting,

alighting, and faſtening the horſes to ſome broken columns, the cavalier ſupported the trembling Agnes along the ſhattered pavement, to a part of the fabric that ſeemed rather more entire. The moon, now frequently veiled by flitting clouds, gave but a dubious and uncertain light; the wind roſe violently, and haſty ſhowers of rain denoted a tremendous approaching ſtorm. One of the attendants, after repeated trials, procured fire by the colliſion of flints; and holding up ſome lighted ſticks as torches, they endeavoured to penetrate the interior part of the building. They entered through a magnificent portico into a once noble hall, through whoſe broken roof the lightning now gleamed horribly; and without ſtopping to remark the deſolation of ſo noble an edifice, they paſſed haſtily along to a door which ſeemed to lead to ſome other apartments; it opened, however, into a paſſage, along which they proceeded, and Agnes, trembling and terrified, thought ſhe heard noiſes,

noifes, and begged the party to move on as filently as poffible.

"Fear not, fweet Agnes," faid her conductor, who would not relinquifh her arm, having drawn her hand within his, and frequently preffing it with an ardour which Agnes could not reprefs, "fear not," faid he, "we are numerous, and well armed, and will protect you to the laft moment of our lives."

The paffage was long and winding, and the man feared his torches would not laft much longer; at length they came to a door which opened into an apartment, feemingly fecure from the weather, and where fome remains of fire on the hearth ftartled Agnes as much as it delighted the attendants.

"There are then fome inhabitants, it feems," faid the cavalier.

"Oh Signor!" faid Agnes, "who can inhabit here but banditti?"

"Nay, my fair charge, and why not," anfwered he, "poor benighted travellers like

like ourselves? But what is there to fear? Ugo, try to revive that fire."

The fire was without difficulty replenished, for there was plenty of wood in the room; and when the friendly blaze cast a general light over the apartment, it plainly bore marks of inhabitation; for some chairs were placed round a table, on which stood some remains of cold provisions, and part of a bottle of wine. Every one of these circumstances added to the alarm of Agnes, notwithstanding the confidence her companion strove to inspire. To be sure, besides himself there were three men well armed, resolute fellows, and the cavalier was not of a character to be easily dismayed; but the terror of Agnes was not to be overcome, and she sat down by the fire, and wept.

The Signor, apprehensive that she would faint, brought her a glass of the wine; and kneeling before her, besought her to swallow it: but her eyes were closed, she averted her face, and with her hand put aside the wine.

"Agnes! ſweet Agnes!" cried he; "drive me not to deſperation! Drink this wine—what ſhall I do with you here, ſhould you faint?"

"I ſhall not faint," replied ſhe.

"But this will reſtore you," ſaid he; "dear Agnes, oblige me!"

She took the glaſs, and put it to her lips, when ſuddenly the door opened, and a man entered, who gazed, ſurpriſed at ſeeing the room occupied. The cavalier advanced to him, and with an air of politeneſs recounted their little hiſtory, and the man civilly enough bade them welcome, and in a few minutes retired.

The untaſted wine had fallen from the hand of Agnes at this proof that her terrors were not unfounded, and the Signor, fearful of the conſequences of this intruſion to his lovely charge, as ſoon as the man had left the room, returned to her, and with infinite gentleneſs chafed her cold hands, and rubbed her temples. While he was thus employed, the door again opened,

opened, and two men, far ſuperior in appearance to him who had already diſturbed them, entered the apartment. Theſe men advanced to the cavalier, and politely rejoiced that the caſtle had afforded them ſhelter during ſo inclement a night, earneſtly requeſting that he and the lady would leave that room to their attendants, and partake with them of rather better accommodations.

The cavalier, with equal politeneſs, thanked them, and accepted their offer, aſſiſting Agnes to riſe, and ſupporting her towards the door.

Her reluctance availed nothing. She could not explain the alarm ſhe felt at this propoſed diviſion of the party; ſhe could not hint to her companion the prudence of not ſeparating himſelf from his attendants. Fearleſs and noble himſelf, the cavalier ſuſpected no miſchief, and followed the two ſtrangers to a large and comfortable room, well illuminated, with a cheerful fire blazing on the hearth, a good ſupper on a table,

round

round which ſat five or ſix more men of the ſame deſcription as their two entertainers. One of theſe was, however, apparently the maſter of the feaſt, and the ſuperior of the party. He placed Agnes on his right hand, and the cavalier on his left, did the honours of the table with gaiety and hoſpitality, and appeared evidently to be looked up to by the others. The eyes of the cavalier were conſtantly fixed on Agnes, whoſe pallid countenance, and trembling frame, gave apparent ſigns of terror not to be controuled; while her delicacy and beauty attracted the attention of moſt of their companions, whoſe countenances bore general marks of ferocity and uncontrouled paſſions.

The ſickening ſoul of Agnes ſhuddered at her ſituation. Surrounded by men whom ſhe could not but conclude to be banditti, with no protector near but the cavalier, of whom ſhe was almoſt as much afraid as of the others, ſhe knew not where to look for ſuccour; and as the increaſing gaiety, inſpired

by

by wine, took off every moment some restraint from the surrounding company, their looks and words diftreffed her extremely: and though fhe exerted herfelf to avoid fainting, her agitation became every moment more alarming. The cavalier ftrove by every attention to diffipate her alarms, and re-affure her fpirits; and in his attempts to reftore her courage had nearly involved himfelf in a quarrel with one of their entertainers, who, placed near the bottom of the table, kept his eye conftantly fixed on the Lady Agnes, and feemed much inclined to refent her companion's attentions to her. She dared not, however, take any methods to prevent a quarrel, fince that would have only ferved to convince her already too prefumptuous admirer that fhe was interefted in his welfare; and fhe, therefore, remained in great agitation of mind, till, after the fupper was over, feveral of the party retired. The Chief, who was called by the reft Signor Perezzi, remained at table, and by degrees engaged the

the companion of Agnes in a converſation about the politics of Italy, which, at that period, were very intereſting, the country being torn by a thouſand internal diviſions, at the ſame time that it was threatened with invaſions from without; and many plans having been formed by daring private characters, in which ſome had been eminently ſucceſsful, and had afterwards been entruſted with high public commands. Theſe recitals ſeemed much to ſtrike the mind of the cavalier, who, often loſt in deep thought, appeared contemplating what he heard, until, at length, the viſible fatigue of Agnes attracted his attention, and he politely enquired what accommodation the place afforded for his fair companion.

Signor Perezzi ſtarted up, and calling aloud for Beatrice, an old woman appeared, to whoſe care Agnes was conſigned, and with whom ſhe gladly departed, pleaſed to meet with a female attendant in a ſojourn that promiſed no ſuch comfort to her. The old woman conducted her into a large

upper

upper room, in a ſtate of extreme decay; and having placed a lamp on the hearth, commended her to Saint Thereſa, and departed, without enquiring if in any other manner ſhe could be conducive to the comfort of her gueſt.

Agnes, though ſhe had little curioſity to explore a myſtery whoſe explanation would probably have awakened all her fears, and felt little deſire to detain a perſon whoſe company would probably have only confirmed her worſt apprehenſions, yet felt ſurpriſed and grieved at her haſty departure; and ſeating herſelf on the tattered remnants of what had once been a magnificent ſtate bed, ſhe abandoned herſelf to that grief whoſe expreſſion ſhe had ſo long reſtrained, and burſt into tears. After a while, however, ſhe was rouſed from this indulgence by the voices of men, loud, and in anger, not far from her; and liſtening a moment, found that they were in the apartment immediately beneath her's, and that the decay in the flooring enabled her to hear diſtinctly

what

what they ſaid: they ſeemed threatening, and ſpoke at firſt altogether, till at length ſome words, in the voice of the old woman, quieted them, and a moment's ſilence prevailed.

"What ſaid Beatrice?" cried one of the men.

"That ſhe was not his wife," replied another.

"Oh, then all's fair!" replied the firſt ſpeaker, "and I'll attempt my fortune."

"Nay," anſwered the ſecond, "we have all an equal right at leaſt. Let us—"

"But we cannot all ſucceed," interpoſed a third; "we ſhould take ſome mode of determining which ſhould begin the attempt."

"Shall it be by lot?" ſaid one.

"No," cried another, "let the ſword determine."

"You all of you forget," ſaid the third cautious voice, "that though the Signor is not her huſband, he is evidently her admirer;—we had better ſecure him."

"He

"He may be her admirer, for that we all are," replied another of the ruffians, "but ſhe loves not him."

"No! then by Jove it is a noble attempt; we ſhall reſcue beauty from tyranny, and ſhe ſhall live here in love and liberty."

While Agnes, with a heart throbbing with ten thouſand fears, liſtened to a dialogue which could only refer to herſelf, the door of her apartment opened gently, without her perceiving it; and the firſt intimation ſhe had of her danger, was finding herſelf in the ſtrenuous graſp of one of the ruffians.

"While the reſt," ſaid he, "were deliberating, my fair one, I ſtole away to improve the happy moments they were loſing."

At a criſis ſo dreadful, the ready fortitude of Agnes did not deſert her; ſhe preſerved herſelf from fainting by one of thoſe exertions of which the moſt delicate minds are capable at a moment of real danger. She did not ſcream, for that would have brought the whole neſt of villains

about

about her at once; but ſhe ſunk from the arms of the man, and nearly effected her eſcape. He ſeized her again, however, in a moment, and treated her conduct with a ſarcaſtic ſneer.

"Alas!" ſaid ſhe, "pity me, I beſeech you, and overwhelm not a being already cruſhed by misfortunes!"

"It is waſting time, Lady, to talk," replied her ſavage companion; "my comrades will ſoon diſcover my deſertion, and come hither to revenge themſelves on my dexterity.—If, indeed, I have obtained its reward, let them come,—but it is for me to implore your pity."

Again ſhe ſunk on her knees, and claſping her hands, fixed her ſtreaming eyes on his face, which ſhe recognized for the ſame that had ſo earneſtly regarded her during ſupper, and beſought his compaſſion on the wretched Agnes.

"Agnes!" ſaid the man, ſtarting—"Agnes!"

"Yes," replied ſhe, "that is my name."

"Was it alſo thy mother's?" exclaimed he.

"It was," ſaid Agnes, much aſtoniſhed.

"Lady," ſaid the man, in a ſoftened voice, "the name of Agnes recals to my mind a period of my life of which I repent ſeverely. —I was acceſſary to an injury done to a lady of that name; and your features, which ſeem familiar to me, would almoſt perſuade me you were her daughter."

Agnes dared not ſpeak, but ſtill on her knees gazed, weeping, in his face.

"Be it as it will, Lady, I will not harm you; the recollection of her ſufferings pleads for you: nay more, I will befriend you;—follow me."

Agnes, more dead than alive, roſe, and the ruffian ſupported her trembling ſteps with gentleneſs.

"My mother," ſighed ſhe, internally, "do I owe this miraculous help to the remembrance of thy ſufferings?"

He led her from the apartment, where he aſſured her ſhe would ſpeedily be

ſought

ſought by the whole gang, and conducted her along many winding paſſages, to a ſmall low room, where he begged her to enter, and following her in, beſought her to be comforted.

"Rely on me, Lady," ſaid he, "I will protect you at the hazard of my life.—We are ſafe here from intruſion—this is my chamber."

Agnes ſtill trembled with conſcious horror; ſhe knew not what was to follow. Fearful of ſpeaking, yet alarmed for the conſequences, ſhe ſcarcely dared truſt her voice to ſay—"But if the others diſcover your abſence as well as mine, will they not ſuppoſe you have brought me hither?"

"Recover yourſelf, Lady," ſaid the man; "behind that bed is a receſs known only to myſelf; thither ſhall you retire, and as ſoon as we are ſafe from the purſuit and enquiries of my comrades, I will leave you to that reſt you ſtand ſo much in need of."

"Generous man," ſaid Agnes, "tell me

me your name, that I may remember it in all my prayers."

"My name," ſaid he, "is Jachimo;—but, huſh! here are footſteps;—retire, Lady."

With theſe words he opened a low door, artfully concealed by the hangings, and Agnes crept in. He aſſured her ſhe was ſafe, and returned to meet the reſt of the gang, who were in a moment at his door. She was too cloſely hid to diſtinguiſh the words of their parley; but it continued a long while, and ſhe even heard ſome of their voices within the room. Her fears nearly overcame her, but ſhe ſtrove to ſupport herſelf; and after an interval, which had appeared to her of at leaſt double its real length, ſhe found quiet was again reſtored, and heard the voice of her generous deliverer calling to her to come forth without fear. She appeared at length, and renewed her thanks.

"Lady," ſaid he, "we will now loſe no time; you need repoſe, and I will not truſt

trust myself to talk to you now; I will leave you, and the early morning shall bring me hither again, to obey your commands, either to place you under the conduct of your companion, or to attend you where-ever you chuse to command."

"Oh!" said she, "could you, indeed, assist me to escape from him?"

"At your orders," replied he.

"Then lose no time!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Lady, it is now impossible; you could not support the fatigue, nor could I, at this hour, obtain liberty.—The morning will enable me;—but farewel, Lady! depend on me;" and Jachimo departed, leaving her a prey to a thousand apprehensions, that effectually robbed her of sleep.

She felt by no means secure from further pursuit; and yet the manner of Jachimo deterred her from soliciting the safeguard of his remaining near her. She listened to the sound of his footsteps, and heard them for a considerable time along the passage which led to his apartment. Left thus alone,

alone, at a diſtance, as ſhe believed, from every one, and unknowing whether even this lonelineſs was not her greateſt ſecurity, ſhe reſigned herſelf to the contemplation of a fate, which, on all ſides, preſented her with the greateſt difficulties. She had it now, indeed, in her power to fly with Jachimo; but what aſſurance had ſhe of his fidelity, except his yielding to that firſt impulſe of generoſity, which had ſaved her in a moment ſo dangerous? She felt its full worth; but would it juſtify her in truſting herſelf ſo unreſervedly to his protection? Nor was ſhe even certain that he could protect her. He was alone, and her preſent companion, whoever he was, had ſeveral armed followers, and could, without difficulty, recover her from his ſingle arm. With the cavalier too, judging by what was paſt, though ſhe had to fear renewed proteſtations of love, ſhe yet could depend on his reſpectful carriage. Could this always be depended on with ſuch a man as Jachimo, of habits of life, of manners ſo different? And,

And, after all, whither could ſhe now fly? Two days' journey from Colano, to which ſhe never could retrace the way, ſhould ſhe not be wholly at the mercy of her companion? Beſides this, an impulſe, of which ſhe could not to herſelf allow the real force, contributed to determine her to proceed with the cavalier. She was going, as Thomaſine had informed her, to a Nobleman of high rank, who called himſelf her father, and ſhe had alſo ſaid it was Prince Rezzonico to whom ſhe was going; it was he alſo who had taken Sigiſmond away from Colano, though under what pretence Agnes knew not; and was it not, therefore, probable that ſhe might meet with this only object of her attachment? Yet, ſuppoſing this ſurmiſe falſe, what would ſhe have to conſole her for her captivity—for the perſecutions ſhe would be fated to undergo from the man who called himſelf her father, and who would, probably, deſtine her hand to that friend who had conducted her to him? Alas! ſhe knew not to what

extremities that parent might proceed, and ſhe wavered in her reſolution.

The morning ſaw her yet unrefreſhed by reſt, and undecided in her determination. She heard approaching footſteps, and Jachimo appeared to learn her will.

"Alas!" ſaid ſhe, "my good friend, I am unable to decide; have you any plan?"

"If you will allow me," ſaid Jachimo, "I will join your party; I am tired of the way of life here, and among your attendants I have diſcovered a face I think I remember.—Though I ſhall be in a humble ſtation, Lady, I ſhall ſtill be your friend; and if all prove as I have reaſon to imagine, I may not be an unuſeful one."

Agnes cordially thanked Jachimo for his determination, and really felt that her affairs, perplexed as they were, could not be better ſettled.

Jachimo now told her that the Signor had not ordered her to be ſummoned yet for ſome time, and beſought her to repoſe during that interval, promiſing to watch over

over her ſafety, and telling her that moſt of his comrades were diſperſed about in ſearch of game, and other prey, ſo that ſhe need fear no diſturbance.

" I wiſh much, good Jachimo," ſaid ſhe, " to learn the circumſtances which have procured me the comfort of your friendſhip."

" Alas, Lady!" replied Jachimo, " the tale would not be honourable to me, yet ſome time or other you ſhall hear it; now it would carry us into too great lengths; —beſides, when we reach the place of our deſtination, I ſhall be enabled to judge if all my ſuppoſitions be true, and to tell you a more connected tale, as well as to put you better on your guard againſt any preſent dangers."

" It ſhall be as you ſay, my good friend," replied Agnes.

" And now then," ſaid Jachimo, with much concern, " you will try to ſleep— will you not?"

 " Alas!"

"Alas!" faid Agnes, "I fear it will be impoffible."

"Try, however, Lady," faid the good-hearted fellow; "I will awaken you in time;" and with a refpectful air he departed.

Agnes addreffed her thanks to Heaven for having raifed her up fo good a friend, at a moment of fuch extreme urgency; and feeling her mind rather more compofed, endeavoured to take the refrefhment of fleep, of which fhe ftood much in need.

A light flumber brought her a momentary fufpenfion of her alarms, and pleafing vifions added to its refrefhing powers. She arofe, light and invigorated, at the call of Jachimo, and found her companion and Signor Perezzi in deep conference, where fhe had left them the preceding night—marks of gloomy thought imprinted on their brow, and apparently having remained there all night. The face of the cavalier brightened as fhe appeared; and offering her the refrefhment of breakfaft, the table was inftantly

inſtantly ſpread, and after a haſty meal they prepared to ſet off. Jachimo, however, took the cavalier aſide, and begged leave to become one of his party—a permiſſion readily, and even joyfully granted, and not objected to by Signor Perezzi; ſo that this circumſtance being arranged in the beſt manner poſſible, Agnes prepared to purſue her journey with better hopes for the future.

As they proceeded, the cavalier congratulated Agnes on having fallen into ſuch honourable hands, and informed her that Perezzi had, with ſome difficulty, reſtrained the impetuous ſpirits of his followers, having inſiſted on their ſtrictly obſerving the laws of hoſpitality towards travellers, whom the inclemency of the weather alone had put into their power.

" For my own part," added he, " I was preſerved from their ill deſigns, if they entertained any, by never having quitted the Captain, who has known better days, and who ſtill retains the honourable ſentiments of a way of life ſuperior to his preſent ſituation."

## CHAP. VIII.

"Bright burſts the ſun upon the ſhaggy ſcene,
"The aged rocks, their glittering ſummits grey,
"Hang beautiful amid the beams of day,
"And all the woods, with ſlowly fading green,
"Yet ſmiling wave."

BOWLES.

THROUGH a wild and deſolate country they journied, and Agnes had need of all her newly awakened hopes to invigorate her ſpirits to ſupport it. The reſtleſs fatigue of the laſt two days, and the agitation of mind ſhe had for ſome time experienced, had affected her delicate frame, and before night-fall ſhe became ſo ſeriouſly indiſpoſed, that the Signor found it neceſſary to ſeek for repoſe for her, before they reached

reached the village where he had purposed resting all night. At a little distance on the left he perceived the spires of a Convent, and sent some of the attendants forward to ask for accommodations, which were liberally and readily granted; and Agnes found a real comfort in being once more under a roof where she could repose with confidence. As this, like many of the Italian Convents, united in one edifice two distinct establishments for men and women, the cavalier and attendants were received with equal civility; and Agnes felt too much oppressed by fatigue, not to accept the offer the Nuns made, of conducting her immediately to her apartment, notwithstanding she saw among them some faces with whom her heart would willingly have claimed communication:—but overwearied nature called loudly for the refreshment of sleep; and a blessing lately so much denied her, and now enjoyed in full luxury and safety, so much recruited her harassed frame, that she was ready to join the Signor in the

the morning at an early hour, and after paying her grateful adieus to the kind Sifterhood, to proceed on her journey with redoubled vigour.

She obferved, as fhe proceeded, that Jachimo talked much with one of the attendants, who had been all the while in their fuite, and whom fhe concluded to be the fame man he had faid he thought he recognized; but with Jachimo, during the journey, fhe found no means of fpeaking, and almoft longed to reach the place of their deftination, that fhe might make an opportunity of hearing from him the circumftances which had occafioned her fo fortunate deliverance.

The Signor, who had procured another horfe for her, but who ftill kept clofe to her fide, was not fparing of his profeffions of boundlefs attachment; but his conduct was fo governed by the fteady rules of decorum and honour, that fhe feared to fuffer far greater perfecution on account of his love when fhe reached the end of her journey.

At

At length they entered upon a chain of deep woods, and Agnes contemplated the magnificent ſcenery, whoſe monotony was broken by frequent rocks of rugged and gigantic forms, whoſe huge faces projected from amid the noble trees that ſurrounded them, bare and knotted, forming a grand contraſt to the general character of the ſcene. Here and there a ſmall torrent, daſhing among theſe rugged projections, gave new life and intereſt to the view; while from the top of the precipices the goats would look down on the trembling paſſengers with an eaſe and ſecurity that made them ſhudder to obſerve it. Occaſionally too, a ſhepherd's cabin, perched among the cliffs, made them wonder how, in ſo remote and dangerous a ſituation, the inhabitants could procure the neceſſaries of life.—Alas! the ſhepherd's humble meal requires not much aſſiſtance to render it delicious; toil, exerciſe, and poverty give a reliſh to his ſimple fare, and the beverage which the neighbouring ſprings afford, the fleſh of a kid from his

his own flock, or pulse which his own hands have cultivated, are superior, in his estimation, to the far-fetched, and dearly-bought luxuries of the great.

These reflections occurred to Agnes as she viewed the simple habitation, and recollected that she was going to what was called splendour, and a superior style. That happiness, which she had never courted in vain in the shades of Salviati, and which she had trusted would never desert her when united to Sigismond, she now feared was vanishing for ever from her view; and she envied the peasant, who knew no luxuries beyond those that his cabin afforded, and whose heart, wholly occupied by the care of providing food for himself and his family, had no time to dwell on the possible misfortunes of life: yet she immediately checked an envy so ill-founded, remembering that where want and penury demand an instant supply, the social charities of life can be but little exerted. She felt that her heart wanted more than the mere absence of misery

miſery to make it happy, and that even thoſe alarms which often reduce the mind to a ſtate of apprehenſion, as they rouſe the mental energy, quicken the feelings, and invigorate the powers, are preferable to a ſtate where the mind is ſunk below its level, where the godlike powers of reaſon are buried in a deep and obliterating ruſt, where feeling has no exerciſe, and affection no object.—Yet, from the dark proſpect that opened to her own peculiar view, poor Agnes turned with ſhuddering timidity; and the train of reflection thus awakened within her, not all the beautiful and varying foreſt ſcenery, the barren rock, the ſhepherd's hut, nor even the declining ſun, peeping between the boles of enormous cheſnuts, and ſhedding round a crimſon luſtre, beſt known to Italian ſkies, could any longer rouſe her to a ſenſe of pleaſure.

While ſhe was thus ruminating, a large clock, at no great diſtance, ſtruck the hour. She haſtily looked up, expecting to ſee a Convent; but ſhe beheld, ſeated on an

an inacceſſible rock the frowning front of a Gothic caſtle:—ſhe admired the ſublimity of the edifice, its enormous towers, its maſſy battlements, its high-arched windows, and its beautiful fretwork; but while ſhe yet gazed, ſhe found they were leaving it to the left, and aſcending the hill in a winding direction.

Relapſing into her reverie, Agnes forgot the caſtle, until, ſuddenly ſeeing it again before her, ſhe found they had circularly aſcended the hill, and that ſhe was now coming to its back front. Its ſtupendous walls and immenſe foſſe gave it on this ſide an air of gloomy grandeur; and Agnes ſuddenly felt a conviction that this caſtle was the place of her deſtination: nor was ſhe miſtaken. She ſoon perceived her attendants advance to the portal, and ſound the horn; and on the countenance of Jachimo ſhe obſerved an expreſſion which told her that his ideas had received full confirmation.

They waited not long at the gate; a numerous train of attendants ſoon received them:

them; and having assisted the Lady Agnes to dismount, her attentive companion took her hand, and gently pressing it, said—"Now, Lady, I am about to resign the most precious, pleasing charge ever entrusted to me.—Oh! could I but hope that it might be restored to me for life!—Speak, gentlest Agnes! have I an interest in that tender bosom?"

"Alas, Signor! you distress me much," replied Agnes, "at a moment like this, at the crisis of a fate so long dreaded, to importune me with a question like this—"

"At least I will hope, from the indecision of that answer," replied the cavalier, "that you do not regard me with dislike."

"Signor," said Agnes, who found that her presumptuous lover would construe into acceptance all that was not absolute rejection, "of my gratitude for your care be ever assured; but forgive me if I say it is all my heart has, or ever will have to give."

"Cruel, cruel Agnes!" said the cavalier; but

but his eyes, elated with fixed hope, corresponded not with his words.

Agnes feared she was a predestined sacrifice to this lover, for whom her new found father, if such he were, would not scruple to sacrifice Sigismond.

The Signor now led her forward to a saloon, where stood a man of a noble and commanding figure, tall, athletic, well-proportioned, and whose fine features still bore the trace of manly beauty. Agnes beheld the dark, impending eyebrow, the eye of fire, the aquiline nose, the projecting chin, the dark large locks of curling hair yet unsilvered by time; she observed the ardent spirit which still lighted up these manly traits with the fire and energy of youth, and she shrunk as she remarked the impressive scar, in which was written to her apprehension the word "Father!" Her companion led her forward, and bade her kneel to her parent, Prince Rezzonico.

Agnes obeyed; her knee bent before the man whom she considered with horror, and

ſhe ſunk, fainting, in the arms of her conductor. When, after ſome time, ſhe recovered her ſenſes, ſhe found herſelf on a ſofa in another room, her father ſurveying her with ſcrutinizing eyes, and her lover ſupporting her with the tendereſt care. The Prince now expreſſed a wiſh to be alone with his daughter, and the Signor left the room.

"Agnes," ſaid he, drawing near to her, "your form, your face, ſo exactly the counterpart of your mother, give me no room to doubt that you are, indeed, my child; look up, Agnes, and embrace your father."

Agnes received the embrace of the Prince with a reluctance ſhe ſtruggled to conceal, and was again near fainting.

"You are, perhaps, fatigued with your journey," reſumed the Prince, "and I would not now detain you, but that, as we are ſtrangers to each other, it is fit we ſhould know on what terms we meet.—Agnes, your mother and I were united by no ties but

but those of love; yet I am willing to treat you as a favoured child, on one ſole condition, that of implicit obedience.—Speak not!" continued he, " but hear me;—obey me at any rate you ſhall! Perhaps you mean not to diſpute my will; but if compulſion be neceſſary to ſecure your obedience, you forfeit all claims to my favour.—You ſhall now retire; I will ſend your woman to you to conduct you to your chamber.—To-morrow I ſhall expect you to join me below, and in the gaiety and eaſe of your manners I ſhall ſee the obedience of my child.—You will ſee there many Signors—I have ſelected one of them for your huſband; ſhould, however, a ſtrong predilection lead you to another of them, perhaps, in this, I could gratify you.—But beware of my anger if in this circumſtance you diſappoint my wiſhes.—A few weeks will ſee you the wife either of Valenti or of Pigliani, and your conduct will decide whether you are the favoured or the diſcarded daughter of Prince Rezzonico.—I deſire no anſwer!"

interpoſed

interpoſed the Prince, ſeeing her about to ſpeak; "your conduct is the only reply I wiſh for—Farewel!—may quiet ſleep attend you!"

With theſe words the Prince departed, leaving his daughter thunderſtruck at the ſolemnity and abruptneſs with which his will was declared. She felt that all her hopes were for ever at an end, and ſhe was tempted to wiſh that the moment when ſhe loſt all chance of ever regaining Sigiſmond, might be the laſt of her life.

Loſt in a reverie which only preſented to her increaſing miſery, Agnes ſuffered herſelf to be led by a young woman, who now appeared, to a chamber magnificently furniſhed, where the portrait of Prince Rezzonico himſelf hung in frowning majeſty. Silent and overwhelmed, Agnes noticed not the officious civilities of her attendant, who ſeemed much ſtruck with the air of dejection ſo viſible in her new miſtreſs, and who, encouraged by the gentleneſs of her demeanour, ventured to expoſtulate with

her

her on the reluctance with which ſhe met a fate ſo replete with happineſs as her's promiſed to be.

Agnes could ſubmit, without reſiſtanc to the officiouſneſs of this young womar but ſhe could not hear her ſpeak of pro miſed happineſs without an unconquerab emotion. She burſt into a flood of tear and could only exclaim—" Leave me!"

" Leave you, Madam," ſaid the poo girl, much alarmed at her diſtreſs; " no ſurely I cannot leave you in this ſtate."

The girl ſpoke in the voice of ſympathy and Agnes, by a ſtrong effort, dried he tears, and looking in her face, fancied i ſimple, honeſt, and feeling.

" What is your name?" ſaid Agnes.

" Lauretta," ſaid the girl.

" Well, my good girl," ſaid Agne " you may leave me now—I am much re covered; I am not accuſtomed to be waite on, Lauretta, and would wiſh to be alone.

" Dear Madam," ſaid the girl, " pray

let

let me undress you; I shall feel such pleasure in serving you."

It was the tone of spontaneous affection, and Agnes heard it with gratitude and pleasure. She suffered Lauretta to do as she pleased, and asking for her little bundle, the girl produced it, though she said all those cabinets were full of fine clothes for her new Lady.

"We will think of those some other time, Lauretta," said Agnes; "at present if you will leave me a light, I will endeavour to sleep."

Lauretta obeyed; and Agnes, carefully fastening the door, and examining her chamber, to see if she were safe from all further intrusion, drew forth from her packet those papers written by her mother, which she had begun perusing when first Felicia visited her at the Convent, and which the pressure of subsequent events had prevented her from ever finishing. The declaration of Prince Rezzonico respecting her mother's character, overwhelmed her with confusion and distress, though she believed it not; and she

ſhe eagerly ſought to find among thoſe papers a confirmation to the contrary. Alas! ſhe ſought in vain; the papers preſented to her eyes only memorials of a ſorrow which nothing but a conſciouſneſs of ſuch ſhame could juſtify; and Agnes, though ſhe ſhuddered as ſhe read, ſtill continued to peruſe the melancholy lines her unfortunate mother had left behind her. She took out alſo the picture Felicia had given her, feeling a vague idea that it was poſſible her memory might deceive her, and that, after all, it might not repreſent Prince Rezzonico. She gazed upon it only to deſtroy the faint veſtige of a hope, feeble indeed, but of which ſhe ſeverely wept the loſs.

Deſpondent, and not knowing whither to turn for conſolation, her thoughts now reſted on her Sigiſmond, whoſe idea once could ſooth every care to reſt. Alas! he himſelf was now a great cauſe of her ſorrow. Of his fate ſhe was ignorant; but believing him to be in the power of the Prince, it was at leaſt certain that his fate was

 terrible.

terrible. To diſcover any traces of him, however, ſhe believed to be impoſſible, till ſuddenly an idea aroſe, which ſhe unconſciouſly, and even involuntarily cheriſhed, that either Pigliani or Valenti might be her beloved Sigiſmond. The thought, though ſhe ſtrove not to truſt in it, gradually harmonized her ſpirits, and ſoothed her perturbed boſom. She knew no name but Sigiſmond for the object of her tenderneſs—why might not either of thoſe names belong to him? and if they did, how highly ſhould ſhe not think of the indulgence of the Prince—ſhe could not bear to call him father. That idea renewed her woes; but all-powerful love prevailed, and the unfounded hope ſhe had admitted, ſoon proved too ſtrong to ſuffer a rival even in apprehenſion. She laid herſelf on the bed, and a ſoft ſlumber at length ſealed her eyes.

END OF VOL. II.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

*Just published,*

AZALAIS AND AIMAR,

IN THREE VOLUMES,

*Price 9s. sewed.*